

Made in God's Likeness

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[0 : 00] Open our hearts to hear your word and to believe the truths that you speak both about yourself and about who we are. Help us to believe them and live them in Jesus' name. Amen. And please be seated.

Who am I? Why am I worthwhile? They are two very big and important questions that I hope you've asked this week because of some of the tragic events that have happened in terms of human life just in Melbourne.

What does it mean to be a human? I think you probably know intuitively that you are worthwhile. You probably know that in your stomach that when you hear some of the tragic events of the week, you are upset because you know that a human life is worth more than that, that a child deserves to live, that there is an intrinsic worth to humanity that we know exists.

But I think the world is demanding from us a very clear answer on why we think humans are valuable. I think our secular society has in effect lost its moorings, its groundings on where does the value of human life come from?

Think of the confusion that we have in our society with issues such as life and death issues, such as euthanasia, abortion, 80,000 abortions a year.

[1 : 36] We have wars, global wars with massive civilian casualties. What is the value of human life? We have global food shortages.

We have not just the sort of tragic incidents of the week like the Westgate Bridge and there was the mother this week who pleaded guilty to the murder of her 12-year-old daughter because her boyfriend had given her an ultimatum and said it was either her or me.

And he didn't mean for that to happen but that was the result. Tragic. But not only do we have these sort of really extreme, awful events, we have in our society a kind of widespread neglect of children or kind of a disregard or a frustration and we see them as more of a kind of a hassle than a blessing.

Society is crying out for the people of God to show them where does our value come from, really. And there's really no other answer that works except for the answer God gives in the Bible which we'll look at today. It's very difficult if you don't believe in God to really have a strong reason to believe that human life is valuable.

[2 : 51] If you are sort of your typical secular atheist or scientist, science alone doesn't give you much grounding for valuing human work, does it?

I mean science is not meant to do that. Science is sort of meant to sort of figure out how things work. It's not meant to tell you about right and wrong. And so with just science alone, we are just a collection of kind of chemicals.

We are just sort of part of the kind of this blind universe, this almost random universe. We are no special than any other part of the universe.

Not just sort of an animal. We are no more special than a rock. You know, it's all atoms to science. What makes a human being worth more than a cockroach?

What makes a human being worth more than bacteria? The world is looking for answers for that. So much that we take for granted, that the world takes for granted things like love or relationships or human dignity.

[4 : 03] Science says nothing about those things, does it? Science cannot give us the answers. So we need to look to God. We need to look at our maker and see what our maker says about our value.

And in fact, it's just worth pointing out how badly science can get it wrong or how badly you can go wrong when you leave God behind. And it's a bit of an extreme example, but it's just worth

remembering.

It was only a century ago when it was not embarrassing or a shame to be talking of scientists, talking of eugenics, of trying to improve the human race by getting rid of what they saw as the rubbish of the human race.

And this was maybe a misuse of science, but it was an adaptation of Darwin's principles of evolution. This was sort of what they call a social Darwinism.

It's not clear whether Darwin himself would have bought into this, but the ideas logically followed. If science was all you had, it was quite logical that you would think to get rid of the rubbish of the human race.

[5 : 17] So those attitudes were applied to the indigenous people of Australia earlier last century. And the most extreme example was, of course, the Nazis.

Darwinists used the rhetoric of eugenics and of social Darwinism to justify what they were doing. And I'll just give you a quick quote about this from a book called...

Where is it? It's from a book called From Darwin to Hitler by Richard Weckart. It was published about four years ago. He says, Not only do many leading Darwinists embrace eugenics, but also most eugenicists considered eugenics a straightforward application of Darwinian principles to ethics and society.

So this was the beginnings of the post-Christian age where they said the Enlightenment, where science was everything and we weren't going to let religious irrational ideas interfere with how we evaluated the world.

And so Weckart says, Darwinism by itself did not produce the Holocaust, but without Darwinism, especially in its social Darwinist and eugenics permutations, neither Hitler nor his Nazi followers would have had the necessary scientific underpinnings to convince themselves that one of the world's greatest atrocities was really morally praiseworthy.

[6 : 53] You see, they exploited the fact that people no longer had their grounding in God and the worth in humanity that God puts on people and used, in the name of science, this kind of reason to sort of get rid of what they saw as the less superior parts of the human race.

Now, I think that is a misusing of the science, but we need to think, friends, what is our worth? Where does our worth come from? It is no longer self-evident.

It is no longer obvious or common sense that it's wrong to ignore someone or write someone off or even, you know, murder someone or let someone starve and die because they're weak.

It's no longer obvious to humanity. Only the Bible can show us, only God himself as the designer can be the one who shows us the value that we ought to place on each other and on the people around us.

And so when we turn to the first chapter of the Bible, there we are. Humanity, in Genesis chapter 1. We very clearly see our place in the world, our important place in the world.

[8 : 04] We are, as it were, in Genesis 1, of the days of creation, that the climax of all the things that God makes, he then makes humanity. This is what we read before.

God said, let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the wild animals of the earth, over every creeping thing that creeps along the earth.

So God has carefully, orderly designed and made everything that has come so far. And then he makes a new creature unlike anything else. This creature is made in his likeness.

This creature will have a rule over everything else that has been made so far. So God created humankind in his image. In the image of God he created them, male and female, he created them. It's talking about you and me. It's talking about every human being that walks to the face of the earth is an image bearer of the living God. Every human being is made in God's likeness.

[9 : 16] We are special. We are unique. We are worth more than an animal. We are worth more than a cockroach or a bacteria. We are worth more than the endangered panda.

We are special. One of the striking things about biblical religion is that unlike other religions of the time and even of the world today, we don't have much of a place for images of God.

We don't have idols. We don't have visual things that we can worship. Why is that? Why does God hate idols so much? It's because he has already given images of himself in the world.

not to be worshipped but to remind the world of who he is. He's given living, breathing, speaking people to bear his image.

That's why idolatry is wrong. We are meant to remind people of God. We are meant to point people to God.

[10:20] We are meant to live in such a way that we know that we are in God's image, that we are to be for God. We are made by God. We are owned by God. We are for God. See the value in this?

This is where our worth comes from. This is where our value comes from. It's not true to say as some more new age kind of people try and say where they say God is in each of us.

There is a bit of God in each of us. You need to find the God within. That's not true. You are made in God's image. You are kind of a reflector as it were. You are to reflect the true and living God to worship him, to point people to him.

But God is not in you in that sense. God is separate from his creation but within creation he cares about it and he's put image bearers to take care of the creation.

It's not that the animals don't matter or that the earth doesn't matter but God has placed a special creature to take care of the earth and to take care of each other and to worship God.

[11:21] It's you and me. It's your neighbour. It's your work colleague. It's the person that you see on the news that's been hurt. It's the person who's done the hurting. They are all made in God's image created for something better.

Now, theologians have argued a long, long time about what does it actually mean to be made in God's image. What does that really entail? What is it about us that actually does set us apart from non-image bearing animals and creatures?

I think at the very, at least at the very heart of it, it means that we are to rule the earth. This is what Genesis 1.28 says, God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion.

That is a kind of kingly reign. It's strong language of our rule over the earth under God. have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

We are created for no small task. We are created to fill the earth with God's image bearers and to take care of the earth. It's not meant to have a connotation of sort of destroying the earth.

[12:39] We are to sort of subdue the earth by taking good care of it and using it for good. Clearly, it's sad, isn't it? That's not how humanity is using the earth.

We are wrecking the earth but that's only because God has given us this power and we need to use it how God intended us to use it. We are God's vice regents.

God still rules the world. He still cares about the world but God has placed us under his rule to sort of work under him as his instruments in the dominion over the earth.

We are under God and we are accountable to God and we are very valuable to God in that economy, in that scheme of things. I think also, you could probably also guess, I mean this is more speculative but there are other aspects of our humanity that do separate us from the rest of creation that I think probably do reflect our image bearing capacity, our nature of being in God's likeness. I mean if you think of things like people's intelligence, our creativity, you know those things are reflections of God's intelligence and God's creativity.

[13:56] There are shadows of it. Think of our ability to have deep and meaningful relationships and communities, our ability to talk and speak and write and communicate, our morality, our ability to be good or evil, our ability to be holy as God is holy.

All these things I think are probably reflections of what makes humanity distinct and unique as God's image bearers. We might see some sort of echoes of them in other parts of creation but nothing like what we see in people.

I mean it's sort of ironic if you think about it that when the atheist thunders out the atheist summons all his intelligence and thinks about it and speaks and says there is no God, he's actually giving glory to God in a way because he's using his image bearing capacities of reason and of thought and now he's misusing them but even as he speaks, being a speaking creature, he's pointing to the speaking living God even though he's foolishly swearing black and blue there is no God, he's actually pointing to God without realising it.

Have you ever seen one of those photos of there's like a litter of pigs and there's like a little kitten in there and the kitten thinks she's a pig or something actually, the atheist thinks he's something he's not but he's actually made in God's image for God.

Friends, it's a great privilege to be human, it's a great privilege, you are made in the image of God, it is God's gift to us, we ought to cherish it and we ought to tell people of it and we ought to let it change the way that we relate with people or to increase our respect of every person we encounter. [15:52] When there are people that frustrate you, just remember this person is made in the image of God. Yes, that image has been fallen and marred by sin but it still remains, therefore people are worthy of respect and dignity even as we confront them in the evil acts they do.

If you really want to think about what it means to be an image of God, we need to look at the Lord Jesus Christ because it is said in Colossians that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. He is the ultimate example of what it means to be human and in him God is creating a new humanity. He is the awesome example of someone who loved God with all his heart, all his soul, all his strength, all his mind.

He loved his neighbours as himself. What does it mean to be truly human? It's to be like Jesus. He is the great paradigm. And not only his life on earth but even now in resurrection glory, he is the benchmark of what humanity ought to be in salvation, glorified forever, immortal, never to sin again. I mean not that he did but when we are like him we will never be able to sin again, never die again. His is the humanity to which we aspire and that we ought to put out to the world both in our example but also in our words of what humanity ought to aspire to.

[17:23] There is no one like Jesus Christ yet we ought to all be like him. His wisdom, his approachableness, his tenderness and yet his toughness, his love for the Bible, his holiness, his love for God's people, the church, his prayerfulness, his friendship.

Not only is Jesus Christ the only way to God, he is the model of what it means to be truly human. If you want to see what your life is missing, go to Jesus and ponder him.

Saturate yourself in the Gospels of Jesus and when all the Bible points to him so immerse yourself in him and let that be a high bar for humanity.

It is too easy to have a low bar, isn't it? It is too easy to think too little of humanity as our world does. God's property. So friends, as we conclude, remember you are made in the image of God, you are made by God and you are made for God.

You are in fact his property. You are God's property. And so how you act matters. How you live matters. How you live with God really, really matters.

[18:44] Some people say, why would the God of the millions of galaxies, the God of this great universe, universe, why would he care about little bitty me? The answer is, well, of all the universe, you alone are one of God's image bearers.

Some people might say, well, God's not really interested in what I do. He's concerned about other big things in the world maybe, but not me. But actually, you are his image bearer. How you live either brings glory to God or dishonours God.

When you do wrong, it's not insignificant. It really matters to God. When you do wrong, when you disobey the word of God, you're kind of in a sense, you're trampling the infinite honour of the God in whose image you're made.

There's a huge significance in how you live. Some people say, you know, I don't really care. God doesn't care if I skip church or I never pray. But actually, you were created to worship God.

And so it does matter. That is why you exist. My advice is if you find it hard to pray, it is to open your heart to God and actually ask him to help you in that.

[19:57] To confess your sin to him in Jesus' name, as I've seen in Psalms previously. And ask him to fill you with his spirit and just keep praying until you pray, in effect, until you experience that communion with him.

It's good to pray until you get that sense of, this is what I was created to do, to know this God. You ought to pray if you have that sense of you've done business with God as you were made to do.

Friends, your happiness is bound up in whether you will follow the design pattern of your creator. If you buck God's design, then you will not be happy.

If you follow God's design, you will find the life that God intends for you. I think we actually make two different errors and often we make these errors close together.

We either put ourselves down too much or we puff ourselves up too much. Have you noticed that? So friends, don't put yourself down. You need to watch how you speak to yourself.

[21:03] Don't insult yourself or other people. When you do that, you're actually insulting the God in whose image you are made. Never say, I'm worthless. Never say, I'm just an accident.

I've heard people say this, my parents wanted a boy, I'm just an accident. You need to actually learn to say to yourself, I'm made in the image of God. I am valuable to God.

I'm made for a great God. I am God's child. God forgives me. Jesus died for me. In the power of the spirit, using the word of God, you need to preach to yourself your value and not put yourself down. But then some people make the opposite error, which is puffing themselves up. Friends, I don't want you to do this either. You are not the centre of the world, are you? People think they are, but they are not.

God is the centre. Your value is tied to the value of God. Your only worth is tied to God's worth in whose image you are made.

[22 : 08] If God is irrelevant, then we are irrelevant. Humanity is irrelevant. But if God is the most wonderful, loving creator of the world, and then you are made in that God's image, then you're worth something.

Do you see? The greater God is, then the more worth we're going to put on people. So friends, let me encourage you to not puff yourself up, but to see God as the centre, to delight in God.

And as you lift up God, you'll be lifting up yourself, and you will change the way that you relate to people. So friends, this is the message that we are to bring to our society, looking for the reason for why humanity is worthwhile.

This is the base reason. There are more things we could add, but the base reason we are worthwhile, because we are made in the image of God. So let's thank him. Lord God, we do honour you, and we do love you, Lord, that you've made us in your image.

We thank you, Father, that you place on us a significant worth and value. We pray, Father, that we would embody this and live this out.

[23 : 17] We're sorry that we have sinned. We're sorry that the image has been marred by sin, but we thank you that you are renewing it through your Son, the Lord Jesus, into his image.

And, Father, we pray that we would have wisdom as we speak with those around us to tell them of why they are worthwhile and why it is wrong to mistreat one another.

Please, dear God, help us to take seriously the value that you place on us and help us to worship and love you with all our hearts. Amen.