

Our Place and Purpose in God's Creation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 April 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] A gracious father, thank you for your word to us this morning. Thank you that it speaks truth and encouragement. And father, as we look at our humanity, we pray father that you would encourage us seeing what you've done for us and what you've made us to be.

And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Well, it was our daughter's ninth birthday last week and her older sister, Caitlin, an 11 year old, bought her a card out of her own money, which I thought was pretty nice.

Usually they ask us for everything. That is until I saw the card. And so here's on the next slide. This is the front of the card says, sister, I thought I should give you a really special treat for your birthday.

And then on the next slide is the inside. Then I thought being related to me should be enough of a treat for everyone or for anyone. You see, Caitlin's place in our family as the big sister comes with a purpose, which apparently is to stir the little sister.

But to Caitlin's credit, she also cared for her little sister. And after giving her the card, then gave her a present, which she had bought with her own money as well. But you see, our place in family, in a workplace or even in the world often determines our purpose.

[1 : 2 9] And what's more, our place and purpose then together often determine our worth as people, as humans. And in our society, it is often all revolving around work.

So for example, if your place in the workforce is as a janitor, whose purpose therefore is to clean toilets, well, the world doesn't value you all that highly.

Not as much as someone whose place in the workforce is as a doctor. And therefore, their purpose is to heal people. People often think they're worth more.

But you see, people in our society often assess their identity and worth as people, as humans, based on what we do. I mean, when you meet a new person, one of the first questions that gets asked after what is your name is often, what do you do for work?

And if someone says, I'm a builder, then they will talk to you and even perhaps get some building tips for their project from you. But if you say, like I have said, I'm a church minister, well, they very quickly find somewhere else to be.

[2 : 3 8] And if you don't have a job, then you can be made to feel even less than human. Unless you're retired, of course, and then they just ask you where you're going on holidays next. Is that right?

Yes. Can't wait. But you see, for our society, people's place and purpose and thus their worth is very often linked to their job.

But God says it is actually linked to something else. And so while we focused on God of creation last week, which is what Genesis 1 actually focuses on, that's who Genesis 1 focused on is God.

This week, we're returning to the last few verses of Genesis chapter 1 to focus on our place and purpose in God's creation. And as we'll do, we'll see what really makes us valuable.

In fact, we'll see what makes us human and worth a great deal in God's sight. So we're at point one in your outlines and verse number 26 in your Bibles. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals.

[3 : 51] And over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

Here we begin to see our special place in God's creation. As I pointed out last week, Genesis 1 is not written as a scientific account of how God created the world.

Rather, it is written to show us who created the world, who he is like, God is like, and who we are. And here it shows us that we are people who are the pinnacle of God's creation.

Not only are we created last, like saving the best to last, but there are lots of little changes in language here at this point of the chapter, which show our importance.

So in verse 26, the language changes. Before it was, let there be, let there be, or let the land produce. But in verse 26, it changes to, let us make. Only time that phrase occurs.

[4 : 52] It's as though God is getting even more personal here. Something special is being made. And it's us. We'll take verse 27, the word create.

This important word, create, is used six times during these seven days of creation. But three out of those six times, 50% of the time, is used here in this one verse, verse 27.

Why? Because we are special. We'll take verse 31. After God creates humanity, it is not just good, like he has said every other time. Instead, the language changes to very good.

You see, these little changes in language make the big point that we have a special place in God's world. And what is this place? Well, it's as God's image bearers.

Verses 26 and verse 27 tell us three times, actually, that we are made in God's image. And in verse 26, God adds that we are made in his likeness.

[5 : 55] This is what truly makes us special. What does it mean to be made in God's image? Well, it means to reflect and represent God in the world.

How? I mean, when we hear the word image or likeness, we usually think of something representing someone in looks. So a king might create a statue or a painting which represents him by looking like him.

So on the next slide is a sculpture of Augustus Caesar in the British Museum. It was moulded, this image was moulded to look like him.

It represents him in looks. Or when people have children, they are often said to be in the spitting image of their father or mother, by which they mean they look like their dad or mum.

But when the Bible uses the word image and likeness, it's primarily talking about representing someone's rule, not looks. So on the next slide, when Saddam Hussein was ruling Iraq, he had statues of himself, including this one here, to represent his rule.

[7 : 05] He had them placed around the country to represent his rule that he was president. Which is why on the next slide, they then pulled down the statue to represent that his rule ended, that he no longer ruled.

The point is, his image in this statue represented his rule over the country. Or take our coins on the next slide. The reason we can say heads or tails is because every Australian and British coin has the image of Queen Elizabeth's head on it.

Why? Well, because they represent her rule over us and remind us that she is technically our queen, even though most Australians ignore that fact.

Well, in the same way, God made people in his image to be his image bearers so that we might represent God's rule in the world and remind humanity and the heavenly realms that God is king.

Just the way the coins remind us that Elizabeth is queen. And that's one reason why Israel was not to make any statues to represent God. Because we represent God and his rule.

[8 : 15] Of course, we don't represent God by simply standing there, still like a statue. Rather, we represent God's rule by ruling like him. This is what it primarily means to be made in God's image.

To represent God's rule on earth by ruling like him. In fact, this is actually what it means to be human.

For God created humans in his image. Being human is to be made in God's image. Being in God's image is to be human.

Now, there are other ways in which we reflect God's likeness, of course. For example, we were also created good and so represent God's goodness. We were also created in verse 27 as one humanity, one mankind, but with different persons, male and female.

And that represents God's nature, who is one God, but made up of different persons, Father, Son and Spirit. That's why in verse 26, God says, let us, plural, different persons, make mankind in our image.

[9 : 25] And we were also created with the ability to relate by speaking, which represents God who relates to us by speaking. We even were created to live forever, originally, which represents God who lives forever.

But all of that is meant to help us rule like God. It's all to help us be God's image on earth, to represent God in the world and his rule.

This is the place we have in creation. We are God's image bearers who represent the fact that God rules. And we do it by ruling like him.

And this means that people are incredibly special, incredibly valuable in God's sight. There's no other part of creation that is made in God's image, is there? There's no other part of creation that is to rule like humanity.

And so immediately we have this special worth and dignity. In fact, we have such dignity and worth that God will hold everyone accountable for killing people. And so on the next slide from Genesis chapter 9, and we read this.

[10 : 35] God says, I will demand an accounting from every animal and from each human being too. I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

Whoever sheds human blood by humans shall their blood be shed. Why? Well, for in the image of God has God made man.

You see, how we treat one another matters because we are in God's image. Or on the next slide, James chapter 3, he says, he's actually saying, talking against this, he says, With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, which is bad.

Why? Well, because human beings have been made in God's likeness, God's image. You see, being in God's image gives us a special place in creation and automatically gives us dignity and worth.

Our identity and worth is not based on what job we do. It is based on being made in God's image. A given pride of place in God's creation.

[11 : 42] That's what makes us human. That's what makes us valuable. And this has all sorts of implications for how we see human life now, doesn't it? From abortion, that hot topic, to how we treat our neighbours.

So we ought to show respect to all people, even if we disagree with their beliefs. Why? Because they are made in God's image. We ought to value people, even over pets and plants.

Why? Because they are made in God's image. Don't get me wrong. We'll see that it is right to care for God's world in a moment. And those organisations which look to care for animals and creation are good.

But those organisations which care for people are better. Because people are made in God's image. To reflect his rule over creation. Last men's breakfast, I showed the men a picture.

Where I was very young. And just not long married to Michelle. So on the next slide. And in the background are Michelle's parents from England. And in the foreground is Sam the dog.

[12 : 49] And if you think I'm pulling a face, it's because I knew Michelle's parents and grandparents all seemed to love Sam more than me. He even made it in our photo.

There. There. In fact, what happened was there was a photo of Michelle and I on her parents' fridge. And there was a photo of Sam the dog that was strategically placed over my face. Not Michelle's face.

Just my face. I'm higher up on the pecking order now. Mainly because Sam has passed away. But what I should have done in retrospect is perhaps seek Genesis 1.26.

That people are made in God's image next to the photo. Or maybe that would have been too cheeky. The point is being in God's image makes people special. And gives us immediate worth and dignity.

Even more than pets and plants. And this is our place in God's creation. And if this is our place in God's creation, then it determines our purpose. That is, if we are made to represent God's rule made in his image, then that's what we have to do.

[13 : 52] To rule like God. So point to verse 28. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. And then God said, I give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.

And it was so. God saw all that he had made and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Here we begin to see what it means to rule like God, to reflect God's rule in the world.

And first it means filling the earth with life like God did. Do you remember from last week how God first formed things? And I gave you that, my little drawing that was like a child's drawing.

[14 : 58] So the first three days is forming things. For example, the sea and the skies. Sorry, sea down here and skies up there. And then the second three days was filling things with life. So he filled the seas with fish and he filled the skies with birds.

Well, so too are we to fill the earth with life. We're to be fruitful and increase in number, it says. And this is partly why humanity was created as male and female, so that those who get married could be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

Now, we humans seem to have done all right at this because our current world population is 7.5 billion people. A lot of people. And it means, I take it, that those who get married ought to try for kids at some stage if they are able, rather than simply choosing not to because they prefer a comfortable life.

I remember meeting some people at one of my old churches, and they said they weren't, they didn't want children because it wasn't because of infertility issues or age or other problems.

It was simply because children would get in the way of their weekends. That's what they said. I'm not sure they were ruling like God at that point. And for those who are single, I take it that you should have a positive attitude towards children, just like Jesus did who was single.

[16 : 21] For ruling God's world in his image, firstly, means filling it. And secondly, it means subduing it. Verse 28. That is to bring creation under our control.

And again, humanity has done okay at this. After all, we have created solar energy to harness the sun's power. We have ruled over gravity by creating airplanes and rocket ships that go into space.

We've controlled the water of rivers and seas with dams and hydroelectric plants and so on. We've done all right at ruling by subduing creation, by bringing it under our control.

But third, we had to rule by working God's creation. So come with me to chapter 2, verse 15. It's the top of page 3 there. Well, almost the top of page 3. Chapter 2, verse 15.

Here we give in another glimpse of what it means to rule like God. Verse 15. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden. Why? To work it and take care of it.

[17 : 25] You see here, ruling the world means also working the world. We had to use its resources for good, like food and enjoyment. So later on in Genesis chapter 4, a man called Jubal creates music for enjoyment.

And in Genesis chapter 4, another man called Tubal Cain uses iron and bronze to make tools. And then in Genesis chapter 9, Noah uses grapes to make wine. A ruling means working the world and using it, but not abusing it.

Because fourthly, a ruling God's world means caring for it. Chapter 2, verse 15. So I take it, this means not wasting water and electricity. Something I'm trying to teach my children at the moment.

Not simply because it saves us money, but because it's part of caring for God's world. It means there is now a reason to recycle, for those who don't like recycling.

It means there is a reason not to litter. It means there is reason to care for plants and animals. And we have some at our church who are particularly good at this. But all this is what it means to be in God's image and to rule like him.

[18 : 36] Our kids are getting old enough for me to leave them at home for an hour or so, if I've got a duck across here for a meeting at church. And sometimes when I go, I'll say, so-and-so's in charge.

Once when I said that to one of them, they responded by singing, I've got the power. I then chose someone else. No, I didn't. But they were kind of right.

They bore my image as my child and were given power to represent my rule in the home, to rule like me. In fact, they even started speaking like me. Put your bags away and put fruit before biscuits and so on.

Being God's image means we are given the power to rule over creation like him. We are to represent his rule by ruling like him. This is our place and so this is our purpose.

But it's not our only purpose. We also created to rest with God, point three and chapter two. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

[19 : 36] So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, he rested from all the work of creating he had done.

Notice here, by the way, that three times we are told God worked. Work is a good thing, but it is not the goal of creation.

The working of the six days led to the rest of the seventh day. That was the goal. And that's why God made the seventh day special by blessing it and making it holy, setting it apart as special because it was the goal of his creation.

God worked at making his creation so that he might rest with his creation, including us. It's meant to be a picture of fellowship. Once his creation was done, it was then time to enjoy rest and fellowship with it.

And as I mentioned last week, this seventh day has no end. There is no morning and evening the eighth day. This rest and fellowship was meant to last forever.

[20 : 45] And so it's a bit different to our working week where we work for so many days and then rest. Unless you're retired.

Although people tell me that when you retire, you actually become busier than we did when you were working. Is that right? No? Yes, yes, yes. But the picture here is a bit different to the way humanity works now and then rests.

Rather, the picture here is of humanity enjoying God's rest even while they work. If the seventh day is to keep going on forever, then it continues even while they work.

As humanity rules by filling and subduing, by working and caring, they do so always in fellowship and enjoyment with God. It's as though even humanity's work was restful.

I remember when my children were young and after spending all weekend with them, I'd actually go back to work for a rest. I don't know how Michelle and all you mums, ladies who have been mums, have done it.

[21 : 48] But again, it's not quite the picture here. Rather, our rule like God was created to be in constant fellowship with God such that even our work was restful. You see, we have a special place in God's world as God's image bearers who represent God's rule.

And so our purpose is to rule the world like him, but in fellowship with him. The problem is we live this side of Genesis chapter 3 where sin came into the world.

And so sin has corrupted our image and ruined our rule and rest. How? Well, instead of always filling the world with life, there is now disease like infertility and there is death which takes life.

Instead of us always subduing creation, it sometimes subdues us with floods and earthquakes, tsunamis and cyclones, drought and fire.

And death will subdue us all one day. And our work, well, it is now often hard and not always restful, not always joyful.

[22 : 57] As Genesis 3 will say, the ground is now cursed and so we work it by the sweat of our brow. Which is why we have Monday-itis. You heard of that? I mean, how often, if you've been working or are currently working, how often have you woken up on a Monday morning full of excitement and joy at the prospect of another full week of work?

Yes. Not many times, I suspect. What's more, sometimes when you work hard at something, another person comes along and ruins it. And although you may be able to help people with your work now, death will one day take it all.

And caring for God's creation, well, the creation we are to use for good, we end up misusing for bad. And so it rules over us. For example, when Noah makes wine in chapter 9, he then gets drunk.

The wine ends up ruling over him. Or the tools created in Genesis 4 are then misused in Genesis chapter 11 to build the Tower of Babel. Or we simply just don't care enough for God's world and selfishly abuse it.

Or on the other extreme, we care for it so much that it becomes the most important thing, even more than people. And we end up serving plants and animals rather than ruling over them.

[24 : 18] You see, every part of our rule over creation is spoilt by sin. We can still rule, yes, but only partially, not perfectly. What's more, even our rest is ruined by sin.

It has broken our fellowship with God and kicked us out of his presence, out of his rest. And all this means that our very humanity as God's image bearers is actually fatally flawed.

restored. The good news, of course, is in Christ, our humanity can be restored. Which brings us to point four in our second reading. So on the next slide, we read from Colossians chapter 1 that the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn, that is, the heir or the ruler over all creation.

for all things were created through him and for him. Notice again that image is linked to ruling. All things created for him.

He rules as the firstborn over all creation. We also see here that Jesus is the perfect image of God who rules over all things. And so that makes him the perfect human.

[25 : 33] Because being human is to be made in God's image and to rule like God. And just as God ruled for the good of his creation, so too did Jesus. For he actually gave up his throne, came down to earth and went to the cross to pay for our sin so that we could be forgiven and have our own image restored.

To be human again, actually. For by believing in Jesus, God gives us new spiritual life now which is being renewed in God's image. So on the next slide, from Colossians 3, verse 10, we read that those who believe in Jesus have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge, notice, in the image of its creator.

And what's more, we'll be giving you new physical life later in heaven as well which will be in the image of Christ. So at the bottom there from 1 Corinthians 15, we read, just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, Adam, so shall we on the last day bear the image of the heavenly man, Jesus.

You see, Jesus is the one who enables us to restore our image and to renew our image spiritually to be God's image again and will one day renew our image physically so that we can rule over the earth perfectly.

and by doing so, Jesus is the one who enables our very humanity to be restored for to be human is to be made in God's image, you see.

[27 : 14] But Jesus can only do this for those who believe in him and so the first question is, do you? Do you believe in Jesus? For if you don't, then you won't be truly human.

Do you realize that? Jesus is the only one who restores us to God's image and therefore only one who makes us truly human. And so if we don't trust in Jesus, we won't be truly human.

And for us who do, then it means that while we are to continue to fill this world with life by having or helping kids, depending on our status and circumstances, we are all to fill the world to come by promoting and proclaiming the gospel.

for them, people will come to life eternal where there will be no more disease and death that prevents or takes life. There'll only be life to the full.

And while we are to keep subduing this world now with limited success, we know that we will subdue the world to come with complete success. For we will reign on earth with Christ, says the Bible, Revelation chapter 5.

[28 : 22] I even wonder if we'll be able to control the wind and the waves like Christ. I used to surf many, many, many moons ago. And so the thought of being able to command a nice set of waves to surf on in the world to come is rather appealing.

But either way, while we only partially subdue the world now, we will fully subdue the world to come because we will rule like Christ.

We're also to keep working in this world since God sees work as good and laziness as bad. but Christ gives us even more reason to find joy in our work. For we are to work, the Bible says, wholeheartedly as those serving the Lord, knowing we will receive an inheritance from him as our reward.

Colossians chapter 3. What's more, Christ also gives us work that will never be in vain, that death will never take away, and that work is the work of the Lord. God, whether it's teaching Sunday school or Bible study or praying for people or encouraging others in the faith, God will use that work to impact people's lives for eternity, and so that work will have eternal value.

It's never in vain. Death will never take it away. And while we are to keep caring for this creation, we are to do so knowing that there is a new creation to come, and so not hold too tightly to this one.

[29 : 48] And while our weekend rest is limited, often too limited, we are to remember that in Christ we have spiritual rest with God now, such that we are always in fellowship with God, all the time spiritually, like the seventh day was meant to be.

And through Christ we have a seventh day rest, a physical seventh day rest waiting for us in heaven. And so we are to encourage each other to keep trusting in Jesus until we enter that physical seventh day rest in heaven.

For we are God's image bearers, restored in Christ, and so even more valuable in God's sight. And our purpose is to rule God's world in Christ, to become more like Christ, to keep trusting in Christ, until we all enjoy God's rest with Christ in the world to come.

Let's pray. our gracious Father, we thank you for your word. And we thank you this morning that it teaches us to think a little bit differently to the way we normally think in terms of image and being renewed in your image.

Yet, Father, what it says is still true. And so, Father, we thank you for making us in your image, image, and we thank you for sending your Son to renew us and restore us to your image.

[31 : 19] Father, we pray that you would help us to keep living in this world with Christ. Please keep renewing us in your image, spiritually, while we look forward to the day when we will represent your image physically.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.