

Made In His Image

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0:00] One of the most well-known names associated with the study of the cosmos is someone probably all of you are familiar with at least in some respect it's the late Stephen Hawking.

! Hawking was a brilliant theoretical physicist, studied cosmologist, also an avowed atheist. He earned a PhD in doing research on black holes in outer space which provided for him and for others who appreciated his work a further fascination not only with the beauty of the universe but the mystery of the universe.

In 1990 on a BBC program called Master of the Universe Stephen Hawking had this to say about the cosmos and its relationship to the existence of God and the existence and relative insignificance of human life.

Here's what he said. We are such insignificant creatures on a minor planet of a very average star in the outer suburbs of one of 100,000 million galaxies.

[1:18] So it is difficult to believe in a God who would care about us or would even notice our existence. Hawking with a brilliant mind looked at the vastness of the cosmos and came to the conclusion that there couldn't possibly be a God who would care very much about us at all.

And what's fascinating to me about his answer, that particular answer, is that Hawking seemed to automatically focus the question of God's existence not especially on the cosmos itself but on the relationship between God and human beings relative to that cosmos.

It's interesting, isn't it?

He would simply be too immense to actually care anything about creatures like us. I want to offer a different perspective from another stargazer.

This one wasn't equipped with the same measure of detail as Hawking and his brilliance. But he did still understand the vastness of the universe and the relative insignificance of human life.

[3:04] And his conclusion was actually the opposite of Hawking's. Here's what he says. When I look at your heavens and the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?

And yet you have made him a little lower than the angels and the heavenly beings and you have crowned him with glory and honor, giving him dominion over the works of your hands and having put all things under his feet.

Of course, those are the words of King David in Psalm 8. David wrote from the perspective of one who is fully convinced that Genesis 1 is divine revelation, that it records for us the real history of how God created all that exists.

But he also wrote as one who understood that Moses' arrangement of the material in Genesis 1 set the creation of humanity as the climax, the apex, the pinnacle of God's creative work.

Human beings are not insignificant creatures in the midst of a vast universe. Rather, they are the crowning achievement of God's glorious design.

[4:42] And opposite of Hawking, when David considered that, he was overwhelmed that relative insignificance as we are in relationship to the vastness of the cosmos.

Yet there is a God who creates it all and cares intimately and personally about each one of us. And what's the basis of David's presuppositions that lead him to the conclusion that he comes up with?

It's our text for this morning. It's Genesis 1, 26 to 31. Let's read it together. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, And God said, And it was so.

[6:49] And God saw everything that he had made. And behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

Now much of what we're going to consider over the next few weeks, and in this next series of studies, really boils down to what it means to be human. God's good design for human flourishing is going to be expounded upon all through Genesis 2.

And then we're going to get to Genesis 3, after seeing this glorious design for human flourishing, and we're going to see how it all went wrong. But our text for today lays an essential foundation for what comes next.

And the emphasis here is on the uniqueness of humanity in God's design. The purpose statement maybe would go something like this.

That we are made in the image of God is fundamental to understanding what it means to be human. And it must be celebrated and honored as God's very good design.

[8:07] Notice first with me, God uniquely made humanity. God uniquely made humanity. Look again at 26 and 27.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. The first sign here that humanity is uniquely made is this divine deliberation that we note here in verse 26.

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. It's a striking change in the text as we work through the chapter, isn't it?

Why the sudden change in plural pronouns here? The traditional answer for Christians has always been that this is the divine, intra-Trinitarian deliberation of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit active at this moment in creation.

[9:29] Of course, we can't build a full theology on the Trinity here. It's not quite ready for that.

That's a later development, right? But it's nonetheless present, isn't it? We've already seen in verse 2, there is the Spirit of God hovering over the waters, indicating that there is already a co-participant in creation.

And then we get to the New Testament, and we see the full meaning of this begin to be expounded upon and fleshed out with the emphasis of the role of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, and his work in creation.

And we see it all over the place there, and we bring all of that together, and we begin to see there is something unique about this God and the Godhead here. One God, three persons.

But why the shift here? Why does Moses care to do it at this point? Has it done it anywhere else in all of Genesis 1? We've gone through five and a half days of creation now, and not one time has he done this.

Why is he now doing it here? And the point is to heighten the significance of humanity in the creation narrative.

[10:45] It's a striking difference that demands our focus and our attention. Something is coming here that is meant to be understood by us as significant.

And of course, the most obvious assertion of the text then becomes that human beings, humanity, are created beings. It's equally clear that God carefully and deliberately created them.

This intra-Trinitarian deliberation is meant to convey the uniqueness of humanity in God's creative design and order.

I don't know who needs to hear this this morning, but don't you want to listen closely to me. You and I are not here by accident or by fate.

You exist because God meant for you to be here. Your creation was not haphazard in any way.

[12:05] It was carefully and meticulously planned and executed by the same God who hung the sun and the moon and the stars in their place.

The same God who spoke the light into the darkness. The same God who separated the waters that are below the earth or on the earth from the waters that are above the heavens and above the firmament.

The same God that creates earth and causes vegetation to spring out of it so that there are cycles of life for us to enjoy. The same God who creates the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea and the beasts that roam on the land.

The same God carefully, meticulously creates you. It says David again in Psalm 139, You formed me in my inward parts.

You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

[13 : 12] It would be arrogant to possess a high view of self that is rooted in some kind of contribution that you believe that you have made to your significance on this earth.

That would be arrogant. It would be prideful. But to recognize that your value, your intrinsic value as a human being is the result of God's good and careful purpose.

That is worship. And that's who you are. Whoever of you is so discouraged this morning that you wonder if your existence matters or if it should continue, I want you to know God has carefully crafted you for his glory.

It doesn't matter if anyone else sees the value of your life. There is no higher value than that.

You don't have to live for the recognition and the hope of acceptance from any other person. You live for the glory for which you were created by a God who loves you.

[14 : 51] And cares for you. And brought you here on purpose. You live for that glory. Of course, the driving emphasis of the text is that humanity was uniquely made in the image of God.

Which is why David says in Psalm 139, he's fearfully and wonderfully made. There is something about our existence in the way that God has made us. That demands awe and reverence and honor.

27, so God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

What exactly does that mean? There's so many ways we could answer that. More ways than what we have time to answer this morning. I want you to consider it this way.

I want you to think, how would the ancient Israelites wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, how would they have understood this? And Moses' reading of Genesis 1, the image of God, what would they have thought about?

[16 : 06] What would they have understood? To them, an image was a lifeless object fashioned out of wood or metal to represent some pagan deity.

It was not the God itself, but it was fashioned in the likeness of the supposed God. And here Moses comes along in Genesis 1 and he tells us that human beings themselves are the image of the one true God, not lifeless blocks of wood or metal or stone.

Living beings. Why? Because God is a living being. They're not little gods, but they are created in such a way as to communicate the knowledge of God, the one whom they image.

And if you'll notice this in relation to the rest of Genesis 1, this is unique. This is distinct from everything else in God's creation. Bruce Waltke said this, I found this really helpful.

It is often said that the Bible represents God anthropomorphically. That is, we take human attributes and we assign them to God in order that we might better understand God.

[17 : 31] Right? You see that all over the place in the Bible. But he says more accurately, we ought to say that a human being is theomorphic. Made like God so that God can communicate himself to people.

Now I find that immensely helpful. It's not that I'm taking who I am and applying it to God in order that I can understand who he is.

It's no, he's taking who he is and he's putting it in me so that I can understand him and understand myself in relationship to him. In other words, there is a sense in which, just to simplify that thought, there's a sense in which God fashioned us with ears to teach us that he hears and with eyes to demonstrate that he sees, with hands to indicate his sovereign activity.

But beyond the physical, we see that our rationality and our affection and our volition, they're all part of the image of God that we bear to the world.

It's amazing. And this image bearing reality we find here in verse 27 is not limited to a certain subset of human beings.

[18 : 57] It belongs to all human beings. Note in verse 27, man at this point is not a particular individual.

It is a reference to humanity as a whole. So God created mankind, we might say. God created humanity in his own image.

Therefore, all human beings, without exception, bear the glorious image of God and therefore possess a dignity that is unique and distinct from the rest of the created world.

That's who you are. That's who we are. And it's further attested in verse 27 by the mention of both male and female being made in God's image.

This isn't about a man. This is about humanity so that our human dignity is not based on sex.

[20 : 08] It's not based on ethnicity. It's not based on age or stage of development or intellectual capacity. It is rooted in the very fact that we are all image bearers of the almighty God specially created to communicate his likeness to the world that he has created for us to enjoy.

But it's impossible to consider this apart from humanity's fall. Sin didn't destroy God's image in us. But it certainly marred it, distorted it, that righteous and good and holy part of God is not imaged in us any longer.

And yet, in God's personal love and care and concern for humanity, which David wrote about in Psalm 8, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him.

Of course, we see echoes of Christ in that, but he's also speaking about humanity. This is revealed supremely in the fact that God determined a way to restore the image that we have marred.

[21 : 43] He sent a second Adam, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who was the true and perfect image bearer.

We've read it every week in this study so far. In Hebrews chapter 1, he is the radiance, the exact imprint of the nature of God.

He is the true and ultimate image bearer. He is God in the flesh. And he succeeded where Adam failed. There was no sin in him.

He perfectly fulfilled the divine law. And then the great image bearer became our great sin bearer. Dying on a cross to satisfy God's wrath against sinners who have distorted and marred the image. And of course, then God raised him from the dead to prove the efficacy of his sacrifice, to give us true hope of forgiveness and eternal life with him.

[22 : 49] And here's what's so great about it. Now, those who repent and trust in Jesus are being remade. The New Testament tells us we're being remade into the, quote, image of his son.

Into the image of Jesus Christ, says Paul to the Corinthians. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.

The image of God. The image of Christ. From one degree of glory to another. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

We have made a complete wreck of that image that God created us to bear. And then in his love and his care, he himself takes on humanity, subjects himself to our suffering and to our temptations in order that he might then bear our sins so that we could bear his image anew.

God uniquely made humanity in his image. He is gloriously redeeming humanity, remaking his people into the image of his son.

[24 : 05] You know why your life matters? Your life matters because Christ died for it. Your husband may not think that your life matters.

Your wife may not think your life matters. Your parents may not think that your life matters that much. The people you go to school with and sit in class with every week, they may not think that your life matters. Let me tell you, your life matters.

It matters because you're bearing God's image. It matters because Christ died to restore that image in you. You do matter. You're uniquely made. Second, God uniquely blessed humanity.

He uniquely made them and then he uniquely blessed them. We see this in 28 to 30. Would you just look at it with me? And God blessed them.

And here's the blessing. He said to them, Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

[25 : 16] And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.

To every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I've given every green plant for food.

And it was so. This exalted nature of the creation of humanity is now furthered. It begins with the image, but then flowing out of that image comes a unique blessing that God pronounces. We might think of it this way. In verses 26 and 27, we have the form of humanity. In 28 to 30, we have the function, at least in seed form.

The function. I think there's three components here. The first would be procreation. Procreation. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, he says.

[26 : 18] Of course, procreation is not itself unique, but it does take on a greater weight and significance with human beings, doesn't it? We've already seen in verse 27 that human sexuality in which God made humanity in a sexual binary of male and female is part and parcel of bearing his image.

It's critical. It's crucial to that image-bearing quality and essence that we have. It's also essential to fulfill God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Flowing out of the image is the blessing and the first part of the blessing is procreation. Writes Kenneth Matthews, there is no place in God's good order for unisexuality or for any diminishing or confusion of sexual identity.

Human sexuality in Genesis is a blessed function. This is covenant blessing. This is a blessed function in the creative purposes of God and it is essential for carrying out God's mandate for humanity.

There's so much we could say here. Let's at least acknowledge that if this is true and we believe that it is, your biological sex is not simply something that you can toss out or ignore.

[27 : 51] Your embodiment matters. It matters in bearing the image of God. It matters in fulfilling the blessing and the purpose and the function for which God has created you.

And this unique blessing of procreation for human beings at least is that we are privileged to multiply and fill the earth with other image bearers.

that the whole earth is full of glory. We heard that in the prayer of confession last Sunday in Isaiah chapter 6. The heavenly host is singing, the whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord.

That takes on a whole new level of significance and meaning when you consider that in light of the filling of the earth with image bearers. God wasn't content for one image.

He wants a world full of images that communicate His glory. And we get to participate in that. But then there's also purpose.

[28 : 55] There's procreation. There's purpose here as well. These image bearers are to subdue creation. They're to have dominion over it.

We're to care for the created world as God's unique image bearers. Many will use this as an illustration of perhaps a vice regency. We are to care for His created world as His representative but also as His designated rulers of it.

Which is incredible. Of course, this is going to be expounded upon in chapter 2. We'll say more about it there. But it's at least worth considering here the mandate given to humanity to rule and to subdue and to care.

God blesses us to use the earth's resources. There can be no question about that. That's in the next verse. But He also intends for us to protect it.

To keep it. And to care for it. And Christians ought to understand the Bible well enough to know that we should care about the world God has created for us to enjoy.

[30 : 09] Third, there's provision. It's part of the blessing, right? There's blessing flowing out of the image. Part of the blessing is procreation.

Perhaps that's the supreme one. And then there's function, purpose, care for the created world, subdue it. Then there's provision. Everything we need for human flourishing is here.

God gives the plant yielding seed, the trees that have seed in their fruit. And He says, it's yours. Enjoy.

Bon appetit. This, of course, we learned last week is corresponding to day three. God gives mankind the produce of the earth for food.

Now, this doesn't necessarily mean that all creatures were vegetarians before the fall. I don't actually think that's what is intended for us to understand here. Neither does it mean that every single plant was designed to be eaten.

[31 : 15] Of course, we know that too. So then what's the point? I think the point is that God has created a world in which everything that is necessary for human life has been provided.

And in a very real sense, God has taken this beautiful, glorious world and He has given it to man as a gift. And He has said, here, it's yours.

Enjoy it. Care for it. It's part of the blessing. Third, God not only uniquely made humanity, He not only uniquely blessed it, God uniquely honored it.

Verse 31. And God saw everything that He had made and behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Now, we're accustomed to this language already, aren't we? Throughout the creation days, God provides His own evaluation of the things created. on each day except for day two.

[32 : 30] Each time we're told that God saw that it was good, meaning that what God made and the way that He made it was exactly how it should be. And then we get to His evaluation at the end of day six and there's a slight variation.

Did you notice the variation? And God saw in everything that He was made and behold, it was very good. Very good. That doesn't mean that the rest of it wasn't very good.

But there's a uniqueness to the evaluation at this point. Again, the language is intensified here. And the difference in this case is not merely that creation is completed.

Of course, this is a reference to everything. He says it. Everything that He created and He pronounces it very good. But it's not just the completion of creation. It's that it was completed and crowned with God's own image bearers.

That's why it's very good. God's evaluation of the created world in which there is human life to reflect His glory was exalted and honored in a way that it would not be without the presence of His image.

[33 : 42] For creation to be very good, for it to be complete and perfect, it needs the image. It needs the image bearers.

And all of that is to say that God's design for human life and dignity with which He creates every human being is to be honored and celebrated by His image bearers.

We're to see His design not only of the world, but of human life as good and right and exactly as it should be.

And how do we do that? How do we celebrate that and honor that? All kinds of ways. We do it by standing against all kinds of evils that diminish the dignity inerrant in bearing God's image.

church. This is why we walk on October 3rd with the Community Pregnancy Center of Lake Norman. Because we believe, Genesis 1, in that God's design for His image bearers is very good and should be celebrated and honored, not destroyed.

[34 : 58] We stand against racism and bigotry and any distortions of human sexuality.

We honor God's design. We celebrate the image by honoring it the way that God intended it. We do it by caring for those who suffer.

Advocating for those who are abused and abandoned and forgotten. It's one of the reasons I love so much what some of you do with your life.

We have Kristen Slaughter on one hand who every day of her life sees some of the worst of humanity in trying to help kids find homes that people that will love them and actually take care of them.

Why does she do that? Because she understands the image bearer significance of Genesis 1. And on the whole other extreme of that we see Corey and Megan and how now they have given their lives to helping people with end of life care.

[36 : 09] Now, why do they do that? Because they understand Genesis 1. That's why. And all along that is a spectrum of you that are giving your lives and what you do for work and what you do outside of work because you recognize the image.

You're honoring it. You're celebrating it. As you should. It's to seek the good of all people. Even those who reject our faith and would outright deny the very dignity of human life that we proclaim. They still bear the image of God. So we stand with those who would seek for reform to criminal justice. Those who would want to stand for those rights of people that relate to them being human. We celebrate bearing God's image by embracing the function that he has blessed us to serve. Namely, the pursuit of procreation honorably in the way God intended.

One man and one woman in the covenant of marriage. Pursue that. We honor God's blessing that way by a commitment to make use of the earth's resources while not abusing it.

[37 : 31] By living with gratitude to God for the natural ways he has provided for human life to flourish. We honor God's design that way. The bottom line is this.

We ought to celebrate what God celebrates about humanity because we're made in his image. Now scientific investigation and observation can do a lot of things for us.

A lot of really helpful things. We ought not to believe that it can do everything because of course it can't. It can't do everything. It cannot give empirical evidence of how the universe came into existence.

It can hypothesize. It can attempt to test. It's never going to be able to give empirical evidence of it. In other words Stephen Hawking was never able to produce an old videotape stick it in the VCR and say look here's where God created everything or in his world view here's where the bang took place in relationship to the universe so that all things came.

You just can't do that. Science can't produce that. The question about God's existence and the origins of the universe and the relative significance or insignificance of human life then becomes a matter of probabilities right?

[38 : 50] We have to rationalize and reason through the evidence that we do have and what we find is that there is an incredible amount of rational evidence that all point to a divine designer but of all the evidence we have the greatest evidence is humanity itself.

We may not have a video shot of God's existence but we do have an image. We have a whole world full of them so that written into our very existence existence is the knowledge of the creator God whose image we bear and this image is to be honored and celebrated in all people but then for those of us who are in Christ there's an even more profound way that we can understand this because we're reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ to the world in the way that he is remaking us as his people as his church and this image bearing privilege ought also to be celebrated and honored certainly by his people and all of those who follow after Christ