The True Image

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0:00] Our Heavenly Father, You are the God who made light shine in the darkness, and so we pray by Your Word that You would shine in our hearts and show us again the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're still in Genesis chapter 1, on page 1 of the Bible, and if you want to open it, that would be very helpful.
We could actually spend a few more weeks in Genesis 1, but we're going to go to chapter 2 next week. You'll be pleased to know. Last week we looked at the six days, you remember, of creation. We saw that the first three and the second three are a beautiful reflection of each other, from heavens, waters, earth. And in the first three days, what God is doing is setting boundaries, setting limits, separating, creating space.
And in the second three days, God fills those spaces that He's created with blessing. We saw that the chapter is about boundaries and blessing.
[1:09] And it's very important because they belong together. God's blessing comes within God's boundaries. You cannot get blessing outside of God's boundaries. And now we come to day six.

And halfway through day six, we are introduced to the first poem in the Bible, verse 27. So God created man in His own image.
In the image of God, He created him male and female. He created them. And incidentally, the word man, Adam, means human. It's not just male.
It's humankind. And I'm not sure what word to use for it today. Humankind seems a little bit clumsy. However, let me show you.
This is very special. You see, look at the beginning of verse 26. Until now, every time God has created something, He's just given the command. Let the earth bring forth.
[2:05] Let the waters bring forth. Let there be light. But in verse 26, God stops and confers with Himself. You see, let us make man in our image after our likeness.

And let them have dominion, etc. God announces His plan and says, Let us make Adam in our image after our likeness.
Now that is a very small phrase with very big implications. I cannot think of any philosophical, ethical or personal issue that does not go back to being made in the image of God.
We've seen, haven't we, over the last couple of weeks, how subversive Genesis chapter 1. Let me say, if you believe these words that were made in the image of God, it subverts abortion, elitism and any form of racism.
It subverts Marxism, Freudianism or hedonism. It subverts sexism, ageism, euthanasia, eugenics and cloning.
[3:26] Just to name a few. These words are a charter and a challenge for a Christian view of sustainability and the use of technology.

They explain to us that being human means we have meaning and purpose. And the words humble us and they lift us up and they point us most beautifully to the Lord Jesus Christ.
There's some of the implications that I can think of and we have about 20 minutes left. What I would like to do is I just, I want to pull out the three most important implications of these words.
What is being made in the image of God teach us from this chapter? Three things. And the first, it teaches us the stunning generosity of God.
You know, we're in such a hurry to see what the Bible says about us and how it applies to us. It is possible to miss this most basic thing in the chapter, that the creation of male and female in his image is an act of outrageous grace and generosity by God.

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[4:43] Have you ever thought about that? It's the opposite of God being mean-hearted, grasping and holding his power and his niceness to himself. He's giving it away. I mean, the whole creation weeks shows that God does not want to hold on to his position and his glory.

But here in this final creative act, as he creates male and female to be his image, it's a massive demonstration of the majestic kindness of God.
He creates living, breathing humans who are going to represent him to the world, who are going to be his representative, his image in the world. He places them in this pristine place that he has created and he blesses them with life and fullness and joy and procreation and to be like him.
And I think that's why we come to the first poem in verse 27, to celebrate the wonder of this grace.
Can you catch the parallelism in that poem? Just look again at verse 27.
So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created them, male and female, he created them. It's a poem.
[5:52] It's meant to evoke and stir our praise and wonder, I think, and our desire to be everything that God has created us to be. Incidentally, both male and female individuals are God's image and we're going to look at this in two weeks' time when we come to marriage in chapter 2.

But I just point out in chapter 1, sexuality is a good part of God's good creation and sexual identity is part of what it means to be created in the image of God, only male and female.
We don't come from some undifferentiated, androgynous mixture. And I don't know about you, but I often hear this referred to the wrong way around.
I've heard people say, because I'm made in the image of God, my cravings and my desires must be right. I mean, he made me this way, right? That's the opposite of the way the text understands it.
To be made in the image of God doesn't mean all I think and feel and want to do is right. It doesn't mean I'm a little copy of God and therefore I should do as I please. To be made in the image of God means to live to represent God to others, to his world and to God himself.
[7:04] Now, you know that this idea of the image of God is used in dozens and dozens of different ways. I discovered this week, I've never heard this before, but the Mormon Church believes that to be in the image of God means to have a physical body, that as though God had a physical body and we actually mirror his body.

Others say it's our spirituality. Many Christians have believed it's our rationality, our reason. Some Christians think it's our sexuality. Some think it's our creativity.
That's how we're like God. Others think it's our conscience and our moral abilities. Others think it is the original righteousness that Adam and Eve were created with. But I think if you look at verse 26, it's clear that it ought to read, God said, let us make man, not in our image, but as our image, in our likeness.
You with me? There were not so much, the image is not so much one of my abilities or one of my faculties. You know, the image of God is not your brain or your legs or your soul or something you can, something that you have so that if you chop it off, you're no longer human.
It's who we are. It's who we are as God made us to be. And alone, of all the creatures on the planet, this creature reflects God.
[8:28] That's why I think in verse 28, when God speaks to the man and the woman, he twice addresses them as you. All the way through Genesis chapter 1, God speaks of the creatures.

But this one he speaks to. I want to say this carefully, but I think this is one of the most important things to get from this. I think the clear emphasis of Genesis 1 and particularly these verses is how close we are to God.
Yeah, we're only an image and yes, we are what we are by derivation. Yes, we're created from the earth, Adamah. Adam comes from Adamah. But it's quite stunning that God shares his glory with us and he makes us like himself.
And we're so familiar with this, I think it's difficult for us to understand how shocking this must have been to the first readers. The God of the Old Testament is fiercely intolerant towards the making of images.
That's a pagan thing to do. Pagan religion goes out into the forest, takes a tree, brings it back, carves a God and says that's the image of God. And God says, no image can represent me.
[9:40] All idols are false because I have chosen the way I want to be represented in this world through us. And I think it just shows God's gracious generosity.

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You know, God could have stayed in heaven and he could have directed the world by long distance words, but he doesn't. He governs his whole creation by an image, a reflection of himself, who we are.
And in doing that, he's sharing the privilege with us. So I think the first thing we can learn from this is the stunning generosity of God. The second thing, I don't mean to be too obvious, but the second thing we learn is the remarkable dignity of being human.
To be made as the image of God, here it is, this is the basis for human life. It's the basis of the dignity and value of all human life.
We are not just animals, we're different from the animals and we're not here by chance. Now we are like animals in some ways, aren't we? We, like all of the rest of creation, we depend on God, we're answerable to him, we are made by someone else and we are defined by something else.
[11:00] But to be made in the image of God means that human life is fundamentally different from the life of animals. And every human life has an essential value and preciousness to the God of creation.

that's what we believe as Christians. You see, the killing of seals and the killing of whales and the killing of dolphins may be wrong but it's not murder. Killing a human being is always taking the life of someone who is made as the image of God.
And that is why hate killings and racially motivated killings are such an obscenity and so wicked. They are an outrage because you're not just attacking something else in creation.
You are attacking a being in whom is the image of God, as it were. And that's why we can never distinguish fundamentally on the basis of intelligence or wealth or good looks or race or ability.
That our human dignity is completely independent of whether we're making a big contribution to society, whether we can breathe on our own, whether we can survive and live outside the womb.
[12:17] We have an unspeakable dignity and value simply because we're made in the likeness of God. Isn't that wonderful? And what is at the heart of this dignity?

In verse 28, it is dominion. God's, and God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.
Have dominion over fish and birds and every living thing that moves upon the earth. In fact, if you look back at 26, all 26 and all 28 to 30 is dominated by this idea of dominion and a very unpopular idea it is too.
You may not be aware of this but within the ecological movement it's now common to blame the ecological crisis on Christianity. In the late 60s, a man by the name of Lynn White wrote an essay, a very influential essay called The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis and he said that the abuse of the environment is inherent in this doctrine of dominion.
There are so many things wrong with that it's difficult to know where to start. However, I think we have to acknowledge the fact that there are people who claim to be Christian who loudly argue that we should exploit our natural resources.
[13:38] The question we've got to ask is what did God mean by dominion? And I think we look to three places to find what God means here. And the first and most obvious place we look to what what God means by dominion is in Genesis chapter 1.

If we're meant to be the image of God, if we're meant to reflect what God is like in the way we rule the earth, we ought to look at how God does it in chapter 1. And do you remember what he does? He shapes and he boundaries and he fills with blessing and then he steps back and he enjoys the goodness of what he's made to the opposite of exploitation and abuse.
Everything he is doing is for the good of others. We'll come to this. Incidentally, in chapter 2, God has Adam name the animals, which I think is probably an early scientific experiment.
And most of science really just picks up and names things in different ways. In the last couple of weeks, I've read a book by Francis Collins called The Language of God.
Collins is the head of the Human Genome Project and he is a committed Christian. And when they finished sequencing the human genome, he wrote the speech that Clinton gave to make the announcement.
[14:58] And in the speech, Clinton said, and I quote, today we are learning the language in which God created life. I don't know what you think of that quote. I think we could probably say, yeah, human DNA is the language of God so long as we say that mountains and clouds and donkeys and trees and rivers are also the language of God and that you don't need to be a very clever scientist to be able to hear and read the language of God.

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But I digress. Let's go back to the Bible, shall we? So the first picture of dominion we get is from Genesis 1. The second place we turn is to the Psalms and I wonder if you'd turn over to Psalm 72. If you're new to the Bible, Psalms are in the middle. I'm really thankful that God has placed the Psalms in the middle of the Bible. They're always easy to find. We're going to go to Psalm 72 on page 513.
This is a meditation on God's Messiah King and at the heart of the Psalm is the very familiar words of verse 8. May he, that is God's king, may he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.
This is familiar because on the morning the fathers of confederation were trying to name Canada. One Leonard Tilly was late for the meeting because he'd been reading Psalm 72 and the story goes he came into the room and he says, I propose we call it the dominion of Canada because of Psalm 72.
[16:35] Now what kind of dominion is the Messiah supposed to have? Not what Canada is meant to be like. Let me quickly read you just the first seven verses. Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to thy royal son.

May he judge thy peoples with righteousness and thy poor with justice. Let the mountains bear prosperity. That is beautiful. It's the word shalom, harmony, peace, fullness.
Let the mountains bear this shalom for the people and the hills in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, crush the oppressor.
May he live while the sun endures as long as the moon throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the moan grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and shalom, abound till the moon is no more.
You see, the dominion of the sun, the dominion of Christ is a dominion of righteousness, of compassion, of justice, of fullness, of shalom.
[17:46] It's a great picture. It's even clearer in Psalm 145, and this is the last place we'll turn, on page 555. I think this is a meditation on Genesis 1, and on the kind of dominion that the sun will have.

Look down to verse 8, please. The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.
See, God doesn't just, God is not just merciful to us as humans, he has compassion on all that he has made. Verse 13, thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, thy dominion endures throughout all generations.
How? How does that kingdom endure? Verse 15, the eyes of all look to thee. That's not just humans. The eyes of every creature look to thee.
thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand. Thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing. In other words, the animals, when they get hungry, they look to God for food, and God feeds them according to the seasons.
[19:10] And the reason we have seasons is because God keeps them in place. Have you ever thought about that, that God opens his hand to feed us? I mean, when we get hungry, we go to a restaurant, we go to the supermarket, don't we?

But actually, it's God who is opening his hand to us. The seed, and the rain, and the soil, and the animals, they are all from God. The sun, it's all his.
Yes, we live outside the Garden of Eden. Yes, the image is defaced in us. And yes, the whole of creation is caught up somehow in the effects of our sin.
Now there is famine, now there is hunger, but when there is food, it comes to us from the kindness of God. That's what his dominion looks like. And the third place to look for what dominion looks like, we've looked at Genesis 1, we've looked at the Psalms, is to Jesus himself.
And I want to move to my third point, which is very brief. I said that the image of God teaches us the generosity of God. It teaches us the dignity of what it is to be human.
[20:14] But thirdly, it teaches us the wonderful promise that we have in Jesus Christ. When we open the New Testament, we read that he is the image of the invisible God.

He's the exact representation of who God is in all its perfection. He fully expresses who it is to be God. And then we read that though he was in the form of God, he didn't count that equality, something to grasp onto, to hold onto, but he emptied himself into the form of a servant and being found in human form, he humbled himself even to death on the cross.

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How does Jesus demonstrate the image? How does Jesus demonstrate his dominion? He doesn't abuse and exploit others. He does it by serving us through his death.
He doesn't grasp onto his rights and his position and his power and hold them to himself. He does the very opposite. He goes down, down, down to his death and he gives himself for us.
And in response to that, God has raised him up and placed him in the highest place and given him dominion over all things and God the Father, what's happening in the world today is God the Father is bringing all things under his feet.
[21:31] Because Jesus Christ is the second Adam he has come to restore us to the image of God. Instead of worshipping God and serving him and representing him to each other, we've tried to replace God and we've made a mess of the world and we've made a mess of our own lives and our only hope for restoration is in the person of Jesus Christ.

And the New Testament tells us that when we place our faith in him, we actually put off our old nature and we put on a new nature which is being renewed in the image of God our creator.
Let me put it to you this way. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can become truly human. It's only Christ who brings us to full humanity.
Let me leave that with you. So here we are. This is what the image teaches us. It teaches us the generosity of God, the dignity of what it is to be human and the wonderful promise that we have in Christ and I want to say that those three things belong together.
If you reject one, everything falls to the ground. If you reject and take away the generosity of our creator God, there's no basis for human dignity. If you take away what God has done in Jesus Christ, there's no real hope for us.
[22:56] but if we hold them together, we find that we are not defined either by the world or by what is within us or by our pain or by our circumstances, but we are defined by God who made us for himself to be his image.

And if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, it means you don't have to cast around for your purpose and meaning in life. It has been given to you in the person of Jesus Christ. and of all the huge implications that we can draw from this philosophical and moral and personal, the one that the Bible draws out above everything else is just this, that God's plan from the very start was to create a universe for his son and for us as human beings to become fully human in him.
And God saw everything that he made and behold, it was very good and there was evening and there was morning a sixth day. So let's kneel and pray to him.

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