

Genesis 1:26-31

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[0 : 00] Well, Genesis 1 is the absolute perfect place for all of us to go this morning. It is ideal for an online, anonymous, non-Christian, perhaps yourself, to drop in and hear.

Because Genesis doesn't beat around the bush. It deals with the biggest questions of life. But this is also the perfect book for the Christian who's sitting in the pew or on their couch, who's putting on a stoic face, but inside feels like they're sinking below these unceasing, crashing waves of this modern life.

See, Genesis brings all of us back to the beginning. It brings us all back to our base, to the solid rock, to the firm foundation of our faith that no storm can sweep away.

Genesis starts big by answering the question, who is God? That was last week's text. It told of a God who pre-exists before the universe, who is before there was anything.

It tells of a God who creates. God is creative. He's an inventor. He's an artist. And he creates by speaking.

[1 : 21] God's word is what creates and animates and sustains all things. So great is his power and his authority. And Genesis 1 reveals that what God creates is good.

He's a good God. And so he creates good things. And our text today follows immediately from the question, who is God?

By now asking us two derivative questions. If this is who God is, then who am I? And what am I supposed to be doing with my life?

So this morning we have two small, light, easy questions. Who am I? And why am I here? What is human identity? And what is human vocation?

See, Genesis asks the biggest questions of life. So in this age of ignorance and uncertainty, it's the perfect place for all of us to go. First question.

[2 : 25] Who are we? What does it mean to be human? Please open your Bible to page 1. And if you don't have a Bible, if you're at home and you're on your computer, open a new window.

Don't check your email. Open a new window and do a search for Genesis 1. Now, we need to be looking together at this text. And right now we're going to look at verse 26.

God says, let us make man, that is mankind. Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, of the livestock, over all the earth.

So God created humankind in his image. The image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them. Genesis 1 so far has followed this repetitive pattern through creation. Up to now, it's read like a poem or a creation hymn.

[3 : 31] With each day composed as a stanza or a verse, as the beauty and wonder of the creator's creating of creation is performed before us. Until now.

In verse 26, that repetitive rhythm is interrupted. As God here does something different. Something important. And something unique.

Verse 26 kind of shakes you awake from the sing-song repetition that precedes it. Drawing our eyes and our ears to what now breaks in to the narrative.

Because here, God creates humankind in his image. As his image. To be his image. In his creation.

And this is totally different from everything else that has happened so far. This is a unique identity that is bestowed upon humanity alone.

[4 : 29] We and only we are made to be God's image on earth. Here at the very beginning of scripture, we're told our identity. Human beings are creatures created to be the image of God on earth.

Now what does that mean? What does it mean that humans are made to be God's image? Well, if you turn your Bible over a couple pages to page 4. In Genesis 5 verse 3, we're told that Adam was the father of a son.

Who was born in his own likeness. In his image. Named Seth. It's the same phrase. In his image.

So in the way that one's offspring resembles and even represents their parents. So humanity was created to reflect God. We are made to be the image of God as his own likeness.

That word image in the Greek is the word icon. We are created to be icons of God. Now if you've ever used a computer, you know what an icon is.

[5 : 41] It's a representation of something bigger. You double click on an icon on your computer or phone and it opens the program that the icon represents. The icon is not the program.

Rather, it's the portal that leads you. It points you. It takes you to the thing that it represents. You go to your icon. You double click to reach what it points to.

Well, we are made to be icons of God. We are made to be his image on earth. We are made to represent him within his creation.

So that when creation sees us, we ought to be imaging what God himself is like. And therefore leading creation to its creator. So the Bible asserts on the first page, at the very beginning, that God creates all of humanity as his image.

All of us created to be his icons within his creation that represent him and reflect him. Think of the unbelievable status that is bestowed upon every single human here in Genesis 1.

[6 : 53] Every human is created as the image of God. All of us are created to be a representation of God in his creation. And so how we treat other humans is akin to how we treat God.

Not because any of us are divine. We're not. But because all of us are created as his image. To be his likeness. His representative. Now this probably sounds extreme to you.

Because it is. It's outrageous. This is far too lofty a status to bestow upon every human person.

Except that it was Jesus' position as well. Jesus, who we just read, was the actual perfect image of the invisible God. Not a created creature that reflects God.

But God himself. True God of true God. Begotten, not made. Of one being with the Father. Jesus, in Matthew 25, verse 36, tells his followers that how we treat the least and the lowest of people is how we're treating him.

[8 : 02] Jesus equates himself with the people in our midst. The hungry. The thirsty. The immigrant. Or refugee. Or foreigner. The naked.

The sick. The imprisoned. Saying that how we treat these, the least of our sisters and brothers, is how we treat him. How we treat God himself.

Jesus gave his life to save us. To rescue us. To redeem us. Because loving us is how he showed his love for his heavenly Father.

We are made to be the image of God. To reflect God. So how we treat other humans reveals our attitude toward God.

Think about the inherent dignity and value that Genesis 1 places upon every single soul. Every single person. And this is why God immediately blesses humanity in verse 28.

[9 : 04] So that's who we are. Humans are made to be icons of God. We are created to image God. We have been made and sustained in order that we might reflect him. Resemble him.

Represent him to his entire creation. So whoever you are. Whoever you are. Whatever your family of origin. Your gender.

Your ethnicity. Your sexual status. Your orientation. Whatever your socioeconomic situation or age. Whatever your mental capacity or your physical ailments. Whether you watch church online or in person.

Whether you're vaccinated or you're not. All of us have been created to be an image of God on earth. You are created to reflect him within his creation.

We are made to resemble him and represent him and rejoice in him. That is why he made you. That is the identity that he invites you to embrace.

[10 : 04] The Bible goes against our culture here. Because the Bible tells us it's not up to us to create our own identity. You don't need to decide who you are.

Your circumstances and your characteristics do not define you. The Bible tells us we've all been created by a creator to be his image on earth. You are made to reflect God in everything around you.

That's your identity. That's who you are. Our culture is crushing us under the burden of having to define ourselves. To articulate our own identities.

And the Bible liberates us from that burden. And it gives us a value and a vocation that is so far above anything the world offers. You are made to be the image of God.

This leads us naturally to our big second question. What are we to do? How are we now to live as the image of God?

[11 : 08] How do I represent God in my own life? Well look at verse 28. God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And subdue it. And have dominion. Our vocation there has two parts. We're first called to fill the earth. That's the be fruitful and multiply bit.

And then second, we're to rule over it. Subdue and have dominion. Reproduce and rule. Fill and form God's creation.

And this vocation images God. This is really cool. Remember how in the beginning, in verse 2 of Genesis 1, we're told the world is two things.

Formless and void. Well formless means without order. It means the world was unordered. Unstructured. Ungoverned. It was unruly.

[12 : 06] It was chaos. That's what formless means. And we're also told it's void. Void means empty. A void check is an empty check.

It means vacant. So before creation, the world was unordered and it was empty. Or said another way, there was no form and there was nothing filling it.

And then we have six days of creation. And in these six days, God sequentially brings form where it was formless in days 1 to 3. And then he fills what was empty in days 4 to 6.

I love this stuff. So look at day 1. God separated the day and the night. The light and the dark. He's bringing order. Order. He's bringing structure where before there was chaos. He's bringing a rule or a form where there was none.

Day 2, he continues. He separates the sky and the sea. Again, order, structure, form. Day 3, he separates the land and the sea. This is more order, more structure, more form.

[13 : 05] Taking what's disordered and bringing order. And then in the next three days, God now fills what's empty. Day 4, fills the empty sky with stars. Day 5, fills the empty sea with creatures and the sky with birds.

Day 6, fills the empty land with plants and animals. Days 1 to 3, God is forming a formless world. Days 4 to 6, God is filling an empty world. And now God commands us in verse 28, humankind made in his image, his representatives on earth, to do exactly the same thing that he does.

Continue doing my work of forming and of filling. Let's look at both briefly. First, God commands us to fill his creation in verse 28.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Most preachers skip this bit. God wants the world to be full of humans. He wants the world to have far more than just two creatures created in his image.

He wants the world to be teeming with humans. And so God invites us to image him in creation. God orders human procreation. Sex is a part of God's good plan of creation.

[14 : 17] It's a part of his good ordering of the earth. It's part of his plan to fill the world with his image bearers. So as God is creator, he now invites us, created in his image, to create as well.

God is pro-procreation. And in Genesis chapter 2, God reveals the appropriate form and expression of human sexuality. So stay tuned. Next week we'll look at that.

So the first thing we're to do is to create. We're to procreate. We're to fill the earth. And for many of us, this makes us very uncomfortable.

Because what if you don't have children? What if you either can't have children, biologically, or you can't have children morally?

What if you're not married? What if you're single? What if you're same-sex attracted? How can you live in the way that God commands all of humanity here? This is where a full biblical picture really helps us.

[15 : 20] Because when you read the entire book of the Bible and you believe it, when you trust in the God who made you and sent his son to save you, you gain not just salvation, but you're also adopted into God's family.

Through faith in Christ, through receiving him and believing in his name, you become a child of God. And this means that Christians form a family of faith.

When you follow Jesus, you join his body, his church. And this means that you become, to the rest of us, a mother in faith, a father in faith, a sister in faith, a child in faith.

In the Chinese church, they get this. They're way ahead of us. They call everyone auntie and uncle. I was Uncle Chris. It was beautiful. I loved it. So if you don't have children, for whatever reason, I have great news.

If you're in this room, look around you. This is your family. We are your children. You are our parents.

[16 : 26] And we need you to know how to follow Jesus, as you have done. You can be fruitful and multiply. You can grow God's family without having your own biological children.

And many of you have done just that. I have so many mothers and fathers in faith in this room who have nurtured me in the knowledge and the love of God.

Now, if you're at home and you're scared of being seen at church, you're scared of these people, scared of judgment or exclusion or shame, scared that you will not be accepted or embraced, I hope that you'll have the courage to come.

And in coming, you will gain a family. I hope you join the church. You experience the family of God here. And you then are fruitful.

That the people of God may increase through you. Through procreation, maybe. But also through loving others. That you may grow them in faith. So that the people of God may increase and fill the earth.

[17 : 36] So if you don't have kids, if you can't, if you won't, if you're too young or you're too old, if you feel that God has called you to be single for whatever reason, you are not excluded from this command.

All of us are called to fill the earth. To multiply God's children. Fill the earth with followers of Christ. Tell all the world that they may know the reason they are created is to reflect the one who made them and loves them.

And to bring glory to his name with us. Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. That's part one of your vocation. Secondly, lastly, quickly, in verse 28, God commands humankind, created in his image, to rule now over creation.

After filling the world, he says, bring form to it. Subdue and have dominion over my creation. The word subdue here is surprising. Because it's actually a warfare word.

Our English Bible smooths it out a bit. But you could translate it conquer. Or trample. The word dominion is a governing word. It means to reign. Or to rule over.

[18 : 50] And so what God is telling humanity here is that his world requires governing. It requires us, created in his image, to sometimes conquer creation.

To subdue what is not good in order to protect what is. Think of a gardener with a beautiful, lush garden.

Well, in order to keep that garden in its pristine state, any of you are gardeners, you know this. It takes a ton of work. Unwanted weeds need to be subdued, trampled, destroyed.

Unwanted rodents and predators and slugs need to be conquered. Invasive species need to be vanquished. Well, that's what God means here.

Subdue what is not good, that what is good may thrive. Think of COVID. The coronavirus is a part of creation.

[19 : 52] And it needs to be subdued. Conquered. Trampled. I don't think anyone would disagree with that. No one is trying to conserve the coronavirus. We should, as Christians, strive to subdue this virus.

To conquer it. And so every act to conquer COVID is fulfilling God's mandate to subdue creation. To subdue what threatens life so that creation can flourish as God intended.

We're never told in Genesis 1 that creation is perfect. If it were perfect, humans would not be commanded here before the fall to subdue and to rule over it.

So the picture we all have of Adam and Eve experiencing everlasting bliss in the garden is not biblical. They weren't soaking in the sun picking daisies. We aren't told to lie around as his image, his representatives, his regents on earth.

Humanity is called to rule. To give order. To sustain and structure God's creation. The world can't be left to its own devices like weeds in a garden.

[20 : 59] Like a coronavirus that is not resisted. We are commanded to continue to create. To continue to give structure. It's no mistake that at the beginning of the Bible there are two people in a garden.

And it's good. But at the end of this age there will be innumerable people with God in a perfect city. Subduing creation is an essential part of caring for it.

Human civilization and construction and technology does not need to be evil. It can often fulfill our mandate to subdue and give order to the world.

Now this is not a free license to recklessly exploit and destroy all of nature. But neither is it a command to never pull up a weed or develop a vaccine to kill a virus.

Rule over my creation in my name. Preserve and protect. Fill and subdue. That is what it means to be created to be the image of God on earth.

[22 : 00] Creation is God's good ordering and filling of the universe. And we're created in his image and so we're commanded by him to continue his work. To fill the earth and to continue to give it order and structure in his name that it may flourish.

And you can do this in almost any profession or any life stage. The problem is none of us do. We all fail.

We all fall short of this identity and this vocation. We all sin. More often than not we don't image God.

We fill the earth with evil and with sin. Not subduing and having dominion but submitting to sin and being enslaved by it. We failed in our vocation. And we have forgotten our identity.

And so we need help. We need a rescuer. We need a second Adam. A man 2.0. Who unlike us will live a perfect life obeying God's will.

[23 : 05] We need someone who is the image of God to image to us what our life should look like. And so God sends us his son. Jesus the image of the invisible God becomes a human.

The perfect person. And we see as the story unfolds that this perfect person God's perfect image God's only son brings with him God's rule.

God's kingdom. God's order to overcome our chaos. He establishes the kingdom of heaven on earth. He redeems and he recreates this creation that we have broken.

And he subdues sin and Satan by submitting to sin's power. Death. Jesus God's son takes upon himself all of our failure. All of our sin. All of our evil.

All of our disorder and darkness. And he dies. That all of it may be put to death. And forgiven. Then he rises from the dead. He becomes the first fruit of a new creation.

[24 : 08] His recreation. A perfect creation. And he now invites all of us through believing in him to share in this resurrected, redeemed life. And if we draw close to Christ, he promises to give us his Holy Spirit.

To remake us. To be his perfect image. He will restore God's original plan. So that we may reign with him in his kingdom.

In his new creation. Forever. What a God. What a privilege. To be invited now. To image him. In how we live.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.