

The Image of God and the Created World

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[0 : 00] Well, we're continuing our sermon series on the image of God, the imago dei is the Latin term for that. And we've already looked at the image of God in the self, the image of God in our neighbor, the image of God in the man, the image of God in the woman.

And we're going to conclude by looking at the image of God and the created world. And something that happened that was very good timing for this was last Saturday, a few of us got an email from Shelley Kerwin, and Shelley unfortunately is not here.

The Iron Man is taking place up in Whistler, and so she needs to fix all the people who are going to be injured there. But Shelley sent an email about an unexpected guest who had invited himself onto her property.

Here's what she wrote. Hi all, I had an 8 to 12 shift today, and this is who I came home to. We have lots of delicious Saskatoon berries in the yard this year. This fellow has been dining on them too, but he got too hot, so as in most years he plunked himself into the pool to have a nap.

I woke him up to get this shot and then let him be to finish his dream. He is tagged, so he is a problem bear, but today he has no problem to me. I did have to hold back my neighbor's cat, Roberta, though.

[1 : 16] She was with me, and when she saw the bear, she tried to go after him. I had to pull her back and put her in my house, or she would have jumped him. Well, we know what Roberta the cat thinks about this bear.

What do you think about this bear? Do you look at this bear as a problem? Do you look at it as a nuisance? Do you wish that all the black bears would just go away so we don't have to lock our garbage bins anymore?

Are they intruding into our neighborhoods, or are we intruding into their habitat? Now, would you be surprised to learn that God's word, the Bible, it actually tells us how we are to think through questions like that?

Would you be surprised to learn that God tells us how we are to think about black bears, about forests and mountains, about ocean habitats, about the ecosystems and the climate of the earth?

Would you be surprised to learn that God has given human beings a relationship with the rest of his created world? Now, before we get to that relationship, before we get to the assignment that God has given to us as human beings, I want us to take some time, to take some time to marvel, to consider what is so great about the rest of creation?

[2 : 32] What's so great about the skies and the stars above us, about the mountains and forests and animals living in them, the oceans and lakes and the creatures living in those? What's so great about the physical matter of the world around us?

Why did God have to make anything other than human beings? Well, let's first think about what God does for us. What does God do for you and me through his created world?

Four things God does. First, God gives us provision. God gives us provision through his created world. In Psalm 104, the psalmist says to the Lord, You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart.

If it weren't for the rest of creation, you'd all be miserable and dead. But that's not all. God not only gives us provision. Second, God gives us humility through his created world.

God gives us humility. In the book of Job, God humbles Job towards the end of the book by reminding him of how he has created the world and how he provides for all of the wild animals, animals that live beyond the boundaries of the civilized world that Job understands.

[3 : 56] God takes care of them all and knows them all. God puts Job in his proper place as a man with limited wisdom and limited power. And God does the same for King David who writes in Psalm 8.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

The created world is God's antidote for the pride and arrogance of human beings who think we are in control. So the creation gives us provision, gives us humility, and third, God gives us joy through the created world.

God gives us joy. God gives us joy through the world. Again, in Psalm 104, we read, May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works. Who looks on the earth and it trembles.

Who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be pleasing to him.

[5 : 04] For I rejoice in the Lord. As we see the beauty, as we see the goodness of all that God has made, we take joy. We find joy.

Not only in the created things, we find joy in the creator who has made all of those things beautiful and good. And you know what? We find that the source of life, the Lord himself, takes joy in what he has made.

The psalmist says in these verses, May the Lord rejoice in his works. And so he does. God loves the created world we see around us. If you enjoy all the wonders of the world you see around you, know that the Lord enjoyed it first.

And he has been enjoying it for ages before you arrived here. So God brings to us provision, humility, joy. Fourth and finally, God gives us a witness through his created world.

God gives us a witness. A witness of himself. In Psalm 19, David writes, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

[6 : 12] Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. So all of creation praises God simply by being what it is.

Doing what it does. Being good. And what is God's attitude towards the world he created? In Genesis chapter 1, he says over and over again, It is good.

God loves his created world. God brings good to us through his created world. We are one of the creatures he has made in this world. And so the truth is that you and I, we are connected and integrated into his creation.

If we have a relationship with God, then we have a relationship with his creation. And that's a good thing. It's something that I want us to think through today. But remember, every relationship comes with expectations.

That's what we, in the church, what the Bible calls righteousness. Those right expectations that we have in every relationship. So God has given us an assignment toward his creation.

[7 : 14] And this relationship, this assignment, you can find in Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 through 28. If you're using one of the blue Bibles that Russia has handed out, it is literally on page 1. So these are the words that God the Holy Spirit has given to us.

These are going to be our starting place to understand how God wants us to relate to the rest of the world he's created. What his expectations of us are. Genesis 1, verses 26 through 28.

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. And God blessed them.

And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and 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.

[8 : 19] Now over the last few weeks, we've been learning about what it means for human beings to be the *imagodei*, to be the image of God. We've already gone over these verses several times looking at what's in them, but there are two words in here that we've left unexamined.

And those two words are dominion and subdue. Dominion and subdue. These words describe our relationship as God's image bearers.

Our relationship to the rest of the world that God created. Now in the context of our culture, words like dominion, subdue, those are words we don't like much.

They are words that sound like words of exploitation. Words like that bring to mind human authorities who dominate, who oppress, who exploit the people underneath them.

But we have to remember that we come to the Bible and we read words like this, we let God's word define what they mean. Scripture interprets scripture. And so we can't bring our own ideas of what dominion and subdue mean.

[9 : 33] We have to find what they mean from God's word. And we've seen over the last few weeks that to be an image bearer, that means that you represent God, you reflect his character.

To be an image bearer means you represent God, you reflect his character. This means that you must exercise dominion the way that God exercises dominion.

However God exercises dominion, that's how you do it. And so all of those scriptures, we've been reading about God's attitude towards his creation. Dominion. Those scriptures that we read earlier, that has to be present in our minds when we read the phrase, let them have dominion.

Let them have dominion. Now, as we're thinking about what this means specifically, there's one modern scholar I was reading this week who I found very helpful in understanding this dominion, a man by the name of Richard Bauckham.

And I say his name and I hesitate to recommend his writing because some of what he writes really is a distortion of God's word. But the reason that I'm still referencing him is because when it comes to understanding dominion, understanding our relationship to the created world, Bauckham is very, very helpful.

[10 : 44] And so it's worth picking out truth from error, picking out right from wrong in what he says. Here's what he says. The close relationship between the image of God and the dominion means that the latter is an exercise of rule on behalf of God, not instead of God.

Only humanity in relationship with God, knowing its dependence on God, can exercise dominion as God's image. This kind of rule is surely what the human dominion is intended by God to be, a form of caring responsibility for God's creatures.

So this dominion is rule, not instead of God, but rule on God's behalf, a form of caring responsibility for God's creatures. Because that's God's attitude towards his creation.

And then Bauckham explains what it means to subdue the earth. The task of subduing the earth can be understood as stewardship in the sense of responsible care for the earth that God himself still owns and has entrusted to humans for their sustenance and delight.

Now notice what Bauckham is saying here, and this fits so perfectly with what God's word says. God himself still owns the world he created. It belongs to God.

[12 : 15] It's not that the wild animals are intruding on our space or that we're intruding on their space. Both humans and wild animals, they are living in God's space. We are all living in God's space, in God's world.

Notice in verses 29 to 30 what God says to the man and the woman. 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. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that is the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

What's really significant here is that second part where he gives food to every beast on the earth, every bird of the heavens and so forth. Notice who he's giving that commandment to. He doesn't give it to the animals.

He gives it to human beings. He tells them, I have given, I have set aside food provision for them. God expects that human beings will be sustained by food from the earth and they will find joy and pleasure in it.

[13 : 22] And God also insists that human beings respect the wild animals need for food and habitat on the earth. They belong here too. Black bears need huckleberries and pools to cool off in.

And we are responsible to care for the world that God has made. As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures. As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures.

But sadly, you and I know, we know that human beings have not always been good stewards of the world that God has made. We're not very responsible with our technology, with our economic ambitions.

We destroy habitat. We have driven animals into extinction. And the Bible explains that this devastation, people see this as a huge problem in our world today. The problem is much bigger and runs so much deeper than any environmentalist in our world today understands.

At the heart of all this devastation is human beings in rebellion against God who made the world. All of this sin, all of this rebellion, it brings ruin and destruction to all the relationships in our lives, to our relationship with God, to our relationship with one another, and to our relationship with the created world.

[14 : 39] If I were to commit a serious crime such as murder, I would not be the only one to suffer punishment for my crime. All of you would suffer too. Because you are in relationship with me.

You would suffer because of my sin. God warned that when he stands in judgment over human beings who rebel against him, the created world suffers along with us because it's in relationship to us.

It suffers under his curse. In the book of Deuteronomy, God warned Israel that if they rebelled against him and rejected him, that the land would suffer, the crops would fail, domestic animals would be lost.

In Hosea chapter four, God even says that Israel's disobedience brings devastation, not just to them, but even to the wild animals and to their habitat.

Here's what he writes in Hosea chapter four. Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel. For the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land.

[15 : 44] There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing and committing adultery. They break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore, the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

This is the judgment of God. This is an act of uncreation, of God undoing his creative work. In the world around us, we too see wild animals, their habitats suffering devastation.

And we can see that at the heart of it all is human ambition and greed and foolishness. The damage is done by human beings and the damage is also part of the judgment of God on us.

Judgment for our disobedience against his commandments. Judgments for how we have wronged him as his image bearers. And adding on to our own sins is the attitude with which we approach the world he made.

We look at the world and so often in modern society, we see it as a mass of land, a mass of raw materials to be used and consumed for our own pleasure and progress and economic advantage.

[16 : 58] We see it as the raw material that we need to build our own modern day Tower of Babel to gain power and control over our lives, perhaps even power over God himself.

As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures, but we have attempted to displace the king to rule from his throne. To rule instead of him rather than on behalf of him.

And our fellow creatures have suffered the consequence of our sin. The Old Testament prophets, especially Joel and Isaiah, they pictured the land mourning in devastation, whether barnyard animals and crops or wild animals in their habitats.

And then in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, here's what he writes about this mourning in Romans chapter 8. The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[18 : 07] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

And notice how our own future, our own future is bound up together with the future of the rest of creation. As long as human beings are in bondage to sin and bondage to corruption, so too the creation is in bondage to corruption and futility.

The creation suffers devastation and disaster. And its praise for its creator, that praise that we celebrated earlier, it is stifled, it's muted. The commentator C.E.B. Cranfield writes, We may think of the whole magnificent theater of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the chorus of subhuman life, created to glorify God, but unable to do so fully, so long as man, the chief actor, and the drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part.

Our own lack of praise mutes and stifles the praise of the world towards God. But in the middle of this futility, in the middle of this bondage to corruption, we have hope.

Paul writes in these verses that we have hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[19 : 47] And Paul writes that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has the first fruits of the Spirit, the first fruits of the Spirit. What that means is that God, the Holy Spirit, has been given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

And he is beginning the work of renewing you, restoring you to what you were created to be. The glorious image of God.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. That is the destiny of everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, to be the glorious image of God.

Everyone whose sins are forgiven because of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf. If you don't believe in Jesus, know this, Jesus is the perfect man.

The only perfect human being who ever lived. The perfect image of God. In fact, he is the most human being who ever lived because he is the perfect image of God. Jesus is our Lord.

[20 : 55] Jesus is our Savior. He died on the cross, taking the punishment for our sins, rising again from the dead, so that we ourselves would not bear the punishment, so that we ourselves would have new resurrection life through his Spirit, so that the creation itself would be delivered from its groaning and suffering and recreated into a new heaven and a new earth.

We look forward to the day when Christ will return, when Christ will make all things new, giving us new bodies, setting us free from sin and death, setting the creation free from devastation and futility.

When Christ returns to make the heavens and the earth new again, you and I, we are not the only part of creation that's going to be transformed.

The rest of our world will be transformed as well. You and I are the beginning. We are the first fruits, the sneak preview of the new creation. And so as God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures as we anticipate how God will restore all of creation.

As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures as we anticipate how Christ will restore all of creation. This hope, this expectation, this anticipation of our future, it is vital.

[22 : 22] That hope is vital to how we live in the here and now. I've heard Christians talk about our world and dismiss any damage to the environment by saying, it's all going to burn anyway.

It's all going to burn anyway. But Jesus says in Matthew chapter 6 that even though the lilies of the field will be burned, God still clothes them. God still cares for him.

That's how God reigns. That's how we exercise dominion too. You and I are the image of God. We represent God's reign. We reflect his character.

If we decide that we can just trash the natural world because it's all going to burn anyway, what we're doing is we're telling lies about who God is. We're saying he is a God who doesn't care how the lilies grow, who doesn't delight in mountains and hills, fruit trees and all cedars.

We're telling lies about the new heavens and the new earth. We're saying that Jesus and his people will treat the new creation like resources to be plundered rather than a world to be cared for.

[23 : 23] Consider the way that even the Old Testament law given to the people of Israel, that shows God's heart for how his people are to treat his creation in the here and now.

When it comes to the domestic animals in our care, Proverbs 12, verse 10 says, whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

It's no surprise that some of the earliest activists for laws that protected animals were men like William Wilberforce. He was a devout Christian well known for his battle against the slave trade and against slavery in England.

Not many people know that he loved animals and he fought to make sure that they were well treated by other human beings. God too protected domestic animals even in the Sabbath regulations themselves in Exodus chapter 20 23.

Here's what he says. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman and the alien may be refreshed.

[24 : 35] God gave the Sabbath regulations not just for the domestic animals, not just to give rest to the land, but he also to care for the wild animals living in the land. Again, in Exodus 23, the verses immediately prior.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat.

You shall do likewise with your vineyard and with your olive orchard. And in all these verses God is insisting that his people should care for the domestic animals that belong in their families, and he insists that his people leave food and habitat for the wild animals that God cares for.

And notice that God is willing to say, hey, your economic ambitions and your economy has its limits. One year out of seven, you're going to abandon those economic projects, you're going to make sure that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave, the wild animals, the beasts of the field may eat.

As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures as we anticipate how Christ will restore all of creation. Now I know many of you, and this includes me too, I see, I look at many people in the environmentalist movement and animal rights activism, I see the idolatry, I see the excesses, I see the wrong thinking in many of these things that's present there, but we can't just throw all this out the window just because there are excesses and because there are idolatries.

[26 : 17] We can't dismiss the assignments that God has given to you and me. You can't dismiss your relationship toward the natural world because God doesn't dismiss his relationship toward the natural world.

Until studying this week, I did not realize how often God speaks of his created world, especially in the prophets. Our natural sympathy should be with those who want to conserve and care for the world that God has made.

Our natural sympathy should not be with those who want to exploit it for economic gain and human progress if that exploitation means damage. We belong together.

We belong together in community with the rest of God's creation. Notice that in all these scriptures and really in many more, I had to cut out so much from this sermon and many more that I haven't even quoted.

Human beings and their domesticated animals are meant to share God's world with the wild animals and their habitat. And you know what? When Christ returns, when he returns to renew heaven and earth, we are going to share the glory of the new creation together with all of them.

[27 : 24] The prophet Isaiah said a lot about that. As God's image bearers, we are stewards of our fellow creatures as we anticipate how Christ will restore all of creation.

And so let's conclude by looking forward to his return as we read the promise of Isaiah 35 and here's what Isaiah says. The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad.

The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it. The majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. For waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water.

In the haunt of jackals where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.

[28 : 30] Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. of their glory and shall the ■■■arring of aanza from living to the name of the Lord.

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