

Genesis 1.26-31 Sermon / COB / 08.09.15

Introduction

- † If you were here last week, who is the hero or the literary protagonist of the Bible narrative? God.
- God is the eternal, all-powerful, creator and sustainer of the universe, who created everything out of nothing, initiated all forms of life, and did so such that all of creation was [טוב] in Hebrew, i.e. it was good in God's sight, both pure and useful for God's purposes.
 - Some people say the Bible is about us – our creation, our salvation – but as we are about to see, even our creation is more about God and his glory than about us.
- † Open a Bible to Genesis 1.26; it's on p.3 in the pew Bibles; we're still at the very beginning.
- The word "Genesis" means "beginning" or "source." The book of Genesis is about the beginning, when God created time, the universe, and mankind; it is the source and foundation for all that the Bible teaches. In this series, we are learning the big ideas God revealed in Genesis, which we need in order to understand all the rest of the Bible and our own lives.
 - Last week we learned important information about who God is; today we will learn about ourselves, and about God's plan to establish for himself a representative people on Earth.
 - Was there anything special about the creation of people? Why did God create people? Do we have a purpose? What does it mean to be God's image? Let's read our text and find out!

Genesis 1.26-31 NET: Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I now give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the entire earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the animals of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to all the creatures that move on the ground— everything that has the breath of life in it— I give every green plant for food." It was so. God saw all that he had made— and it was very good! There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

God Creates People

- † Up until now, God created by saying let there be light, let there be fruit bearing trees. Now God says "Let us make..." It is difficult to know how to take God saying "Let us..."
- This could be plural like the word for "God" [אֱלֹהִים] is plural, to emphasize God's majesty.
 - Or God might be deliberating, speaking as we might say to ourselves, "let's see what's on TV."
 - If Genesis 1 is a historical account of the original creation, God must have created the angels sometime in the first six days, so God could be speaking to the angels here, like we might say to children, "Let's drive to the store"; obviously only the adult drives, only God creates.

- I like to think “Let us” reflects God the Father speaking to the Son and the Spirit, since we know from New Testament revelation that all three were involved in creation. We cannot say this text *proves* God is triune in nature, but it certainly feeds our understanding of what Jesus revealed.
- † In any case, everything up to now has been leading to this moment. God says, “Let us”; then v.27 elaborates and repeatedly uses the verb “created” for emphasis, to get your attention.
- Look at what vv.26-27 say about the fashion in which God created people. God created all other animal life “according to their kinds,” but he created people in his own image.
 - This is tremendously important to understand! Scholar Bruce Waltke wrote, “Fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture is the creation of humanity in the image of God.” In other words, you cannot understand what God is revealing in Genesis or in the rest of the Bible unless you understand what it means that people are created in God’s image. What we are learning today is one of the fundamental and essential truths in all of scripture! Are you ready?

In God’s Image

- † Ok, let’s start at vv.26-27: notice God did not create us to be gods; contrary to new age thinking, God did not create us of the same essence as himself. Rather God created people according to his likeness, to be a faithful representation of himself, but not of the same essence as himself.
- Still, since we are created in the image of God, we exist at a higher level than other forms of life. We are self-aware, able to discern spiritual things, to make moral decisions, to feel moral results in our conscience. We can analyze, synthesize ideas together, and build a logical argument. We can never create something out of nothing, but in a reflection of God we too are creative.
- † We also can perceive something of God from how he designed us. **Psalms 94.9 NET: Does the one who makes the human ear not hear? Does the one who forms the human eye not see?**
- God hears and God sees, though God does not have a physical body, for he is spirit [John 4.24] and he has forbidden us to represent him for worship with physical images [Exodus 20.4-6].
 - Yet when the prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of God [Ezekiel 1.1-28], he saw a figure that looked like a man but ablaze with fire, with a radiance like a rainbow.
- † Look at vv.28-30: God was communicating with people; people can have a relationship with God. We can discern God and yearn for God. In **Psalms 42.2 NET**, the author exclaimed, **“I thirst for God!”**
- We need human relationship too. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy fellowship together; so God created us to be in community; this includes church, but the basic form is marriage, family.
 - V.27 shows God created male and female in his image, which we’ll discuss in a few weeks.
- † Now look at v.31. Along with the rest of creation, mankind was judged to be “very good”! When something is good in God’s sight, there is purity and usefulness for God’s purposes.

For God’s Purpose

- † These are ways we reflect God, but let’s consider his purpose for us, his reason for creating us. We should always remember that our purpose in life is derived from being created in God’s image.

- Consider the person who does not know Jesus. Do such people give any thought to being created in God's image? No. So are they intentional about trying to live like the image of God? Do their lives usually reflect being made in God's image or the flesh and sin?
 - Now consider the average Christian. How often do we seriously reflect on being made in the image of God? How intentional have we been in constructing lives that scream out evidence that we are made in the image of God?
 - Priest Brennan Manning said, "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle." We need to live out the purposes for which God created us and saved us.
- † To live out our purpose as the image of God, we have to understand why God created people in the first place. Surely the most obvious aspect of being created in God's image is that we would reflect God's character. Our character, how we live, should reflect the image of God.
- Would you agree that Christian parents hope their children will reflect their morals and beliefs? God hopes his children will reflect his morals and beliefs.
 - We will learn in a few weeks that we now are born with a corrupted human nature, which distorts our reflection of God's character. That's why Paul wrote to believers in **Ephesians 4.22-24 NET: You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man who has been created in God's image— in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.**
 - Though we suffer with sinful corruption, we Christians are called to pursue spiritual renewal so we once again can reflect the righteousness and holiness of God, and thus bring him glory.
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- † Reflecting God's character is necessary to carry out another aspect of our purpose, that people would represent God throughout the Earth.
- In the Ancient Near East, an image like a statue represented a king or pagan god. We represent God by sharing his truth and love with others, as we reflect his character in the way we live. In every situation, we should be God's man or God's woman on the ground.
- † An image also could rule: a prince was the image of the king, who ruled in the king's name. Look at v.28: God said to the first people, **"Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."**
- God created people to represent him, which in part meant to rule the earth in God's name. Do you remember what it means to do something in God's name? You need to memorize this; I know you go around praying in the name of Jesus and serving in the name of God. To rule in God's name means you rule by his authority, by his will, by his guidelines, and for his glory.
 - So we are God's stewards, we represent God on earth and exercise stewardship over the earth for God. Because we represent God, we are to rule as God guides us. We learn later in scripture that we are to rule sacrificially, selflessly. We are to bless creation, not exploit it.
 - How many of you have taken care of someone's house or pets while they were away? Friends do that for me. They enter by my authority, with my key; they are there by my will, because I asked them to be; they follow my typed directions; and they go for my benefit, not their own.

- They care for my property as my representatives; they rule over my house and pets, but they do so in ways that benefit the house and pets, not to exploit my house and pets for their own gain.

† **Genesis 2.15 NASB: Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep [watch over] it.** People were not to kill or eat animals. Yet there is implied here some natural wildness, which requires a ruler to subdue it and cultivate it in God's name.

- How many of you enjoy looking at well kept gardens? In the gardens I had in Florida, even when there were no weeds, the flowers and the gardens as a whole could get unruly and thereby lose some of their beauty and usefulness; so I would walk around for a few minutes each day to do a little pruning, maybe some watering, the occasional transplanting, to subdue the gardens.
- I did not exploit them and I did care for them, but it was my goal to subdue them and rule over them. This is what God commanded people to do over the earth. All this should factor into our approach today to the environment, energy, farming, trash disposal, and related fields.

† God gave the first people both promise and command, so people were to trust and obey, for God provided empowerment and purpose. Everything about how God made people, from our creative abilities to direct communication with God, illustrates his empowerment so we could represent him.

- Look at v.29: We see another hint of God's empowerment in his provision of seed plants and fruit for the human diet. Later we will see that God also provided fresh water springs.

† God's blessing, his provision, also included fruitfulness, the ability to multiply. Because of God's blessing, the world would be filled with plants and animals, and the all of nature was healthy and able to reproduce. God gave to mankind also the blessing of reproductive potency.

- Yet this blessing was different, improved, for people, because we could reproduce not only a baby human, but also the image of God! Like everything else, man and woman reproduce after their kind, so generations will be like their parents; but man and woman were made in God's image, so they were like their Father, God, and could reproduce his image.
- Look at v.28: This is a command to multiply people, it is a command to represent God and rule in his name. But the only way filling the earth with people was going to fulfill our purpose of representing God and ruling in his name, was if we were multiplying the image of God.
- God invested spiritual life in people, and he blessed them to be able to procreate that spiritual life in new physical life, in their babies. This is one of the greatest blessings in the creation!
- Sadly, one result of our corrupted state is that now not everyone can physically reproduce. Even in Old Testament Israel, the reproductive promise was conditional on the nation walking with God by obeying the Mosaic Covenant; if they honored God, God would prevent the corruption curse from disrupting fertility. We don't have even that promise today, so barrenness is possible and is not a sign of personal disfavor from God.

† Before we go on, I want to share ways all this should affect our thinking. First, with each pregnancy, we procreate a new spiritual life, which is part of God's original plan and purpose for mankind.

- It is true that every child is conceived with corruption, and thus needs a savior in Jesus, but every child has a soul, has spiritual potency, carries inherent within the original design of being the image of God. Thus there is sanctity in all human life. That means every child, every fetus, is a blessing, even one conceived in sin, even one conceived through sin against us.

- That is why abortion is a sin. That is why suicide and assisted suicide are sins. That is why God told Noah in **Genesis 9.6 NET**: **“Whoever sheds human blood, by other humans must his blood be shed; for in God's image God has made humankind.”** That is why every person in this room, in our schools, in our slums, is important and valuable; every person through procreation is created in the image of God.

† LeeAnn’s grandmother is ninety-four, she is physically and mentally failing, and emotionally distraught. She has no discernable way to help anyone, and she wants to die and get to Heaven. Still, it would be a sin to help her death along; it probably is a sin even to wish to die, because her life is a sacred gift, she carries the image of God, and we cannot know what purpose God has in keeping her here as his representative.

- Another thought. I hope our teenage girls will present their husbands with the gift of their virginity on their wedding night; I hope our teenage boys will do the same for their brides. But while I would share a parent’s concern and grief over a teenage pregnancy, our reaction should include rejoicing at the miraculous gift of new life, new life which carries the image of God.
- Another thought. I admit I cannot fully fathom the trauma that must come with rape. One of my fears for even male friends in prison is the risk of rape. Yet, even with that grievous, sinful, act of violence against a woman as the cause, the resulting baby is procreated in the image of God. I understand feeling repulsed about carrying or raising a rapist’s baby; but that would be the woman’s baby too, and more importantly it would be God’s baby, created in his image.
- One more thought. I’ll skip over murder, because I hope that is obviously wrong. But let’s talk about our neighbors who are poor, struggle with addiction, have committed crimes, have debilitating illnesses, are mentally or emotionally handicapped, and have cultural behaviors that work against them in life. It is true that some of them have dug their own holes acting in sin or foolishness [as have we!]. But every one of those people is created in the image of God, so we should love them and proactively seek to help them come to Christ and improve their lives.

† Ok. I would stress that multiplying God’s image remains our purpose today. Jesus reiterated this command for the church, revealing we could fulfill it spiritually through evangelism and mentoring.

- Open your Bible to the Great Commission found in **Matthew 28.18-20 NET** [p.1130 in the pew Bible]: **Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**
- Multiplication is part of our creation in God’s image, and it is the mission God gave the church for this time period. Thus multiplying the image of God should be one of your top priorities.
- If you have children, raise them up to know God, believe in Jesus, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to reflect God’s image.
- Whether or not you have children, pursue your own spiritual growth, learn how to share the gospel and then lovingly do so with lost people, and become involved in the teaching and mentoring ministries of the church. This is part of God’s purpose for every believer. We have been created and saved to be his image, which includes multiplying that image in others.

Christ and Our Purpose

† **[Original 3 Circles]** I want to share one graphic with you. If it is true that what we are learning is one of the fundamental and essential truths in scripture, then this might be a very useful graphic. I call it “the three circles,” and it represents what we have been discussing.

- **Psalms 8.5b-6 [NET]: You [God] grant mankind honor and majesty; you appoint them to rule over your creation; you have placed everything under their authority.**
- The three circles represent this relationship: God remains in authority over the human family. And the purpose of the human family is to be God’s image by reflecting God’s character, and by representing God to the rest of creation, which includes ruling over creation in God’s name and multiplying that image everywhere.
- We reflect God’s character while we represent him, while we multiply and rule in his name. Character and mission are integrated in God’s plan. You cannot be holy and obedient without being missional; you are not carrying out the mission if you are not pursuing holiness.

† **[Modified 3 Circles]** As you study the Bible, it is important to remember that God’s character never changes; and God’s initial purposes for people – which we discussed today – never change; But over time, God has provided to his people unique guidance and missions for each historical period.

- Over the next few weeks, we will learn more about the mission and guidance God gave the first family, but we can sum it up with our three circle diagram: they were to reflect God’s character and represent God as they multiplied God’s image and ruled in God’s name over all creation.
- Later, when all of humanity was failing at this, when they were in rebellion against God, God selected one family to develop into his representative people. This was the family of Abraham, which would become the nation of Israel. They were to reflect God’s character and represent God to all the other nations; eventually they will rule the nations with Christ as their king; in the meantime they could multiply God’s image through raising up children to walk with God and through influencing foreigners to worship God.
- Today, the church is to reflect God’s character and represent God to all the people groups of the world [to all the people who do not know God]. We do not rule in God’s name, but we are supposed to influence culture and law as God’s representatives, and we are to multiply through raising up our children to walk with God and through leading others to believe and walk with God, as we read a few minutes ago in the Great Commission.
- Throughout the Bible, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, one prominent theme is of God establishing for himself a representative people. Keeping that in mind will help you make sense both of the commands Jesus gave to us and the ways God interacted with Israel.

† Because of sin, we now fulfill our purposes incompletely, but when Christ returns to set up his kingdom, he will restore our position and function, so that we can completely fulfill God’s plan.

- Even today, Christ mitigates our corruption by breathing into disciples new spiritual life, empowering us to multiply the image of God through the gospel mission, and transforming us to be like him and thus be effective representatives for God.

† **Colossians 1.15 NET: He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God. Hebrews 1.3 CSB: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature.**

- Jesus was able to be the perfect person, the perfect image, because he also is the divine Son, the essence of the Father. He is the perfect reflection of God the Father's character, the ultimate true image of the Father, and the perfect representative of the Father, who will purify and guide the rest of us to fulfill our purposes.
- Therefore we seek to be like Christ, who was as we were intended to be. **Romans 8.29 NIV: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...**

† Your boss asks you to do something illegal, and will fire you if you don't go along. What do you do?

- Your accountant advises things you can get away with to lower your taxes. What do you do?
- Someone in your youth group or small group gets drunk now and then. What do you do?
- Everyone at school or work makes fun of a particular person. What do you do?
- Your neighbor is a nice old lady who thinks all religions are the same. What do you do?
- Your children are not disciplined enough to pray and study the Bible. What do you do?
- Conservatives want to end regulation on logging, liberals want to end logging. What do you do?
- Your neighbor's recycling is blowing down the street. What do you do?
- Your church needs people to develop into small group leaders and teachers. What do you do?

† Keeping in mind that we consistently fall short and the exhortation that we need to strive to do better, we still should find this passage encouraging. One of the most important things you can remember from all this is that you have significance in the universe; you have value, purpose, validation, and identity, because you have been created in God's image.

- With that blessing comes responsibility: responsibility to worship and obey God, to reflect God's character, and to represent God as his steward or ambassador; but it all starts with God empowering and blessing you! And no matter how difficult life gets, that never reflects a downturn in your value or significance: you are God's woman, God's man, put here for his purposes, made in his image, so you are tremendously significant and valuable, no matter what.
- Your life will have its ups and downs. So will your performance in it. Your career, your finances, your popularity, your influence, your success in meeting your goals, your contentment, your family, your friendships... all will have their ups and downs. But your value, your significance, your purpose, your identity do not! Because scripture teaches that your value, your significance, your purpose, your identity are not tied to worldly affairs; rather they are based on being created in God's image, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- You are important to God! Right now, no matter how well or badly you are doing in life or in representing God, you, right now, are important to God!
- Many of us suffer from anxiety, depression, or stress because we are insecure about our sense of self-worth. We search for significance through achievement, popularity, or wealth. What we really need is to sense that we are valued by God. I hope this sermon will help you sense that.
- Spend some time reflecting on the truth that God created you in his own image; Jesus died so you could be in relationship with God; the Holy Spirit has indwelt you so that you can experience empowerment and transformation to become the image of God and carry out your purpose as the image of God. Nothing in the universe is as significant and important as you! Let's pray...