

Humanity

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[0 : 0 0] Well this morning I want to, this morning and this evening actually, at ourselves at half past five, I want to look, continue to look at this theme of beginnings.

And I mentioned on New Year's Day the reason that we're doing that, and we've done it before, not that long ago, is because it's hugely important.

It's hugely important that we are rooted in who we are and where we come from. All of us need to know that. You know there's always that interest in who we are and where we come from.

Genealogies are interesting to many people. And very often we think about who we are in the light of who our parents are and how they acted and very often you'll find the older you get that you find that you act very similarly to the way your parents acted and do the same kind of things as they did.

Grandparents may be great grandparents. But it's hugely significant and important spiritually that we think about beginnings. So I want to go through these early chapters again briefly and just think about some of the truths that God has chosen to give us.

[1 : 2 3] I'm sure we've all read the early chapters of Genesis many, many times and you all know the early chapters of Genesis and I certainly have read them many times. But coming back to them again this week and last week what has struck me more than anything is how much God chooses not to say.

There's a huge amount of things that God doesn't say about beginnings. And he's very selective in what he says. There's a massive amount of information I would love to know.

But in many senses Genesis brings, the early chapters of Genesis lead us to more questions than answers. And also remind us of the mystery of God, that God doesn't tell us everything.

We like to think sometimes that we know everything. And I think more than any time apologetically as Christians when we're defending our faith we struggle when people ask us questions that we don't know answers to and we think we need to give them an answer because we're a Christian.

Because we're friends with God, because we're in communication with God we feel, oh well I need to have an answer. We don't need to have answers. God has chosen not to tell us lots of things. There are secret things that Bible tells us that God has not revealed and that is hugely redeeming and releasing and freeing for us as well.

[2 : 4 7] Because that's also where faith comes in. Where we trust this God who has placed us here for maybe three score and ten years at the most.

Maybe a few years more, maybe many years less. He's placed us here. We don't need to know the workings of the universe. We don't need to have all the answers. We're only here a short time.

But He wants us to serve Him. And He wants us to follow Him. And He wants us to understand everything through the prism of the cross. Through God revealed in Jesus.

God of course isn't only revealed in Jesus, He's revealed in creation. And that's very important for us. So therefore the important truth of creation for us is not creation as such.

It's God. And the reason that people struggle with creation however we understand it happening. And as I said on New Year's Day, I'm not going to deal with that.

[3 : 50] However people deal with creation, the problem that they have is a spiritual one. Because creation reveals God. And therefore when we struggle with creation, we're struggling with God.

I mean Romans chapter 1 and verse 18 says, See the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Since what has been made known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen.

Being understood from what has been made so that people are without excuse. So there's a real spiritual reason that we speak about creation because creation reveals God and leaves people without excuse about the reality of God.

Now that seems very hard to accept in a society that has moved away from God. But that is what God teaches and what we recognize and believe. And if you also look up Hebrews chapter 11, Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 3, that great majestic chapter on faith, chapter verse 3 says, By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

[5 : 21] So you've got two explanations there about creation that remind us that it's a spiritual truth that we're dealing with. One is that it leaves people without excuse.

You can tell that there is a Creator by looking at the person beside you, by looking at the beams of this created building, by looking at the sky that you can just see outside.

And if you walk up Arthur's seat, by looking at the view and the mountains and the hills and the rivers, you can see and know that there is somebody behind this, there is a Creator behind this.

But also we're reminded that we can only accept this by faith. It's not enough just to see creation and say, Oh, well, then that's great. I believe I'm going to be a Christian and I'm going to go to heaven because I believe God made the world.

It's not as easy and simple as that. We need faith to come to that position because sin has blinded us to the reality of God. So we come round to that whole concept of blindness and inability to see and a rebellion against God and the need for faith in our lives.

[6 : 34] So it is important for us to recognize the role of faith in believing in a God who made us and made this world.

And also recognizing that people suppress that truth deliberately, that they press down on it. They say, No, it's not. This isn't the case. We must have evolved. We've come from just scientific nothingness, but we've come that way.

There is no higher power, no Creator being. There is no first cause, no personal first cause behind the universe.

And people suppress that knowledge of God because the problem is spiritual. People don't want God. People aren't interested in God. People want to suppress God from their lives.

And that spirit is within us all. It's just sin, isn't it? When was the last time you prayed?

[7 : 35] But why don't we pray? To suppress God. Our own lives are significant and important enough. Don't need God. When did we last open the Word to hear what God's saying?

The Bible closed. We have our own wisdom and our own knowledge. When did we last fall on our knees? We've got to worship. We struggle with that. When did we ask Him for the decisions that we need to make in life?

It's okay. I can make my own decisions. Intelligent, free thinking. Because we have that innate sinful rebellion which wants to repress God.

Even as believers who've been touched by grace, we're battling against this desire, always to suppress Him, to keep Him down, to keep Him not as Lord of our lives.

And that's what we struggle with all our times, in so many ways, and so much of the time in our lives. So when we come to a chapter like this, we're reminded of who we are again, at a very basic level.

[8 : 39] What or who am I? And this passage that we've read takes us to the creation of humanity. We looked on New Year's Day at the rest of the creation that God made as it is given to us in this account.

But this is great. And what's great about this as well is the language. Every word is weighted. Every word is carefully chosen.

Every word tells us something about what God wants us to know here. And what I also want to do is, this morning I was scribbling down some questions from this passage.

And this year in city groups, at least up till June, I would like us to reflect on one of the sermons the week before by looking at maybe four questions, three or four questions on the passage.

And sort of taking the passage a step further in our city groups where it's more informal, where we can talk together, we can ask questions and where we can dig a bit deeper and make it a bit more personal.

[9 : 46] And so there's a bit of continuity between what we're doing here on a Sunday and also what we're doing in the city groups on a Wednesday. So there'll be that, hopefully, that taking of the truth and the questions that go with it and we can begin to put questions every time that we're looking at the Bible and every time we're preaching.

Because you know what I think? I think despite what we think, and maybe specifically despite what preachers think, preaching makes hardly any difference to anyone's lives.

Now you may disagree with that and feel free to do so. But I think preaching is having far more effect than it actually is having.

Because I'm a preacher. That's what I do. That's what I spend my time doing. But I don't think it affects your lives and even my life as it should. Why is that? Because I don't think God is working in it as much as we would want him to.

And why is that? Because I don't think we pray about it enough. And I think we just come to be spoken to and leave. I'm not making a judgment and I'm not criticizing anyone.

[10 : 59] I'm just saying I think that's how it is. That we come and enjoy and we leave. Maybe it's like a meal that we come and we eat and we enjoy and we go away home and then we've forgotten a few days later what we've eaten.

But it's done as good at the time. People say that about preaching. That sounds like a preacher that said that. I don't know if that's right or not. But we're looking for the word of God.

Because we look to that, didn't we? And Jen is the first to... The power of the word, the significance of the word and God being the word and communication. And so I don't want this to be a passive thing.

So I want it to be active both spiritually and in the questions that we ask. And in the intelligent thinking that we put God and His Word and into His application for our lives. So I'm rambling.

Who am I and who I am? Well, this passion speaks about humanity, speaks about us and tells us a little bit about ourselves. We're special. In other words, we're not just sophisticated animals.

[11 : 57] Okay, we are different from the animal kingdom. Glorious and beautiful and intricate and complex though the animal kingdom is. And if you're watching Africa, which is the new series by Amber, you'll be amazed.

It just makes you worship. It makes you worship. To see the intricacy and the beauty of creation as God has given it to us.

But we are different from the animal kingdom. On the sixth day, this is the last day of creation, the pinnacle of God's creative work. We find that the language changes and that everything changes.

And we have God moving from, or the language moving from, and God said, and God said, and God said, and God said, and God said it moves to let us make.

So there's a difference there. Previously God had just spoken and it happened. But here there's this consultative process going on. Let us make man in our image and in our likeness.

[13 : 06] There's this sense in which God is taking time with humanity and is making humanity different from the animals, obviously.

Clearly that is the case. There's this sense in which he is discussing with himself the creation of humanity. Now of course the Old Testament, people of God to whom it was written by Moses, Moses was given this.

They only recognized a new one God. The Lord your God is one. They had no true concept of the Trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So they wouldn't have understood necessarily any reference to the Trinity here.

And there's a lot of commentators that would also say that you shouldn't take any reference to the Trinity here. That it's a kind of majestic plural in the same way that the Queen would say, let us do something.

Let us go for a ride in our carriage. The royal we that we talk about, the we of majesty and of significance and importance. But I doubt that.

[14 : 13] It may be magisterial. It certainly is magisterial because God is king. But clearly as we look back at that with the New Testament as we can certainly at least speak of a hint of the Trinity here that God is in consultation with himself as he is making us in his image and not a solitary lonely individual being, but a being of glorious complexity and of fellowship and of intimate relationship within himself.

So we're special in that even the language that's used of our creation is different, but also the fact that we are made in God's image. There's this lovely little poem in verse 27 in the Pew Bible it's broken down in poetic form.

So God created man his own image and the image of God he created, male and female he created them. Three times creation is mentioned. God makes humanity in his own image and he molds them and forms them to be like himself in his image and in his likeness.

Now there's masses of amount of words that have been written about image and likeness and his image different from likeness it's just the same meaning with different words and to be honest I don't know, but there may be slightly different emphasis in the two words that are used, different nuances between image and likeness, but clearly, clearly when we have this being created in the image of God, there's the whole idea of relationship, the whole idea that is absolutely vital that God made human beings to be in relationship with him, to be loved by him, to be friends with him, to be his counterparts on earth.

So we've got humanity reflecting God, the image of God, reflecting God back to himself on earth. And we've got that complementarity between male and female, it's not just man in God's image, it's not just women in God's image, it's man and woman together in God's image that as that together begins to reflect the person of God because within that there's society, begin that there's relationship, within that there's love and companionship and that's beginning to speak of the glory of God and of his nature of the diversity of the Godhead and that he immediately communicates with his people and God said to them, he doesn't speak to the animals, who was it that spoke to that?

[17 : 04] I can't remember, someone spoke to that. And Dr. Doolittle, he speaks to the animals, but God doesn't speak to the animals. God creates the animals, but God speaks to humanity. God speaks to them, God blessed them and he said to them.

So there's this whole idea right from the beginning of a relationship and of a uniqueness of humanity that means that we're different from the animals in the zoo, from the wild animals, however much we love, however much we look like them, however much we act like them, I'm gonna come back to that in a minute.

Relationship, it speaks also of rule because there's this whole idea of being made in the likeness of God, God in his sovereignty, God in his kingship, God in his lordship, and he says that we are to be fruitful in verse 28 and increase the number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, every living creature that moves in the ground.

And there's this idea of God giving humanity a God type role over the created world to have dominion. It is no negative connotations whatsoever dominion does for us today, but in verse 15 of chapter two, say the Lord God took the man, put him in the garden to work and take care of it, to care for it, to nurture it, to look at it, there's no concept, there's no implication at all of any negativity there, rather stewardship that God has made us to reflect his lordship over the created world, to protect it, to cultivate it, to rule with righteousness and justice and to live in harmony with the created universe.

Now I'm gonna say, the trouble with doing this to him like this in the morning and the evening is that I'll probably repeat some things at night that are in my thought for today. But one interesting thing that I had never really thought about and I beg your forgiveness for this because you've probably all thought about it before, is that even at this stage Adam must have known something about the need to protect this world.

[19 : 18] He must have known something about the reality of evil and the serpent. That's implied in the whole idea of governance and lordship and protection.

It's given here. I had never really thought about that before. But I believe that to be the case. There must have been some knowledge of, he knew about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So he knew about the reality of something that was malevolent that needed, he needed God and he needed to protect the environment from it.

So there's that sense of rule, but there's also the command and the encouragement to be reproductive, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it or rule over it or take care of it.

And the idea is of a fruitful society of people who themselves become creative and create children and create society and create families in God's image.

[20 : 23] That they reflect his own bearing other image bearers who like children like their parents bearing the image and the image and likeness of their parents.

Oh, you're so like your father. You've got your mother's eyes. And we see that, don't we, in humanity. We see the image bearing passing down.

And that reflects the image bearing that was originally given to us from God, that there's to be this development of society, of community, of communication, of love, of image bearing, of passing down good things.

An ongoing passing down development of good things. And along with that reproductivity, there's also a realism that he is to be fruitful and increase, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the sea and the birds as I've said before.

And there's that whole ethic, good, give me a good Protestant sermon without a work ethic. And we have that reality of, it wasn't a slovenly place.

[21 : 37] You know, Adam wasn't gonna swan in around just flicking his fingers and everything was perfect, and nice, which it was, but there was work involved.

He was to expand into this world. He was to explore this world. He was to enjoy the creative sovereignty that he had over this world.

He was to be a decision maker. He's to have effort. She is to have effort. There's to be work. There's to be responsibility.

There's to be excitement, goodness in this world that God created, realism. There was work, but it wasn't cursed.

And that's the difference when you feel a heavy weight on a Sunday night. The sort of work on Monday, which I don't have. I get on a Saturday night.

[22 : 34] And then on a Monday night for the rest of the week. But I love what I do. But there's also this whole idea of enjoying God, isn't there? There's this whole idea of a God who is given and given and given, and it's a beautiful world.

And there's a world of relationship. And it's so far from our own image of God, this tyrant in the sky, that we battle against understanding. And there's this great enjoyment that is, you know, verse 29, isn't it?

Just a magnificent, glorious verse. I give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food to all the beasts of it. And this is a God who's pouring out His blessings and His goodness on humanity. No, just think of the garden of Eden, this small little fenced-in garden.

It's the whole earth He's been given, the whole earth. They can take anything from that whole earth. Apart from one.

[23 : 36] And He's given all of that. And the animals are given all of these things. If you'll notice, they are also vegetarian. Both humanity is given every tree and every all fruit.

They will be yours for food. And for the animals, I give every green plant for food. And it was so. That's what God gave. That was the reality of His sheer goodness.

There's a real joy here. If we can think of and imagine anything, we find it in this creation that God has made. When a translator says, and when a translator of Hebrew in the Old Testament often, and he speaks about this translation in verse 31, God saw what they had made, and it was very good.

And he says, and it really was very good indeed. It's quite a kind of Oxford or Cambridge translation.

But we know exactly. It's very, very good indeed. It's rich in its explanation.

[24 : 47] It was excellent. There's almost enthusiasm coming out. There's real enthusiasm coming out from the translation. It was an absolutely gloriously good, wonderful creation that God had made.

And it's a beautiful picture that battles with the terrible cynicism of the day and age in which we live. So very briefly as I close, what can we learn from this account, which is really so different in many ways from the world in which we live, even though we have shadows of that beauty.

And there's things that will take our breath away, and yet they're only shadows. Because it reminds us, and I'm not going to say much about this, because we'll go on to look at this in its biblical order, the catastrophic effect of sin.

Because this glorious creation was that we were to be in relation with God, image bearers of God, responsible to God, under God, with God, from God, given by God in this glorious way, and sin separated us from that, all of that.

And the catastrophic result of sin for us today is that God has moved out of the picture altogether, and that we have no beginnings other than scientific ones, other than rational ones or rational and inverted commas ones.

[26 : 23] We are no more than sophisticated animals. There is no transcendence. Ultimately, there can be no spirituality, because there's no explanation for it if there's no God.

There's nothing. There's only pure physics and chemistry and what we see and what we feel and what we touch.

There is only atoms. There is only flesh and blood. There's nothing else. God doesn't exist. There is nothing else.

And that is the way that society is increasingly going in its thinking. And it is utterly nihilistic. It is absolutely empty of majesty, of beauty, of transcendence, of hope and of a future and of truth.

We are utterly in control, utterly. Our own lords, our own gods. Life is just about me. And it must be about me, because it's not about me.

[27 : 38] Who else can it be about? There's no point in it being about anyone else. Our own service and giving and sharing and sacrifice are meaningless concepts when they're not grounded in the one who's the giver of these things.

But the consequence, of course, in so many ways is that we make absolutely horrific animals. We are ugly grotesque animals.

There's no animals in the animal kingdom that are vaguely like humanity, that's all we are. There's no animals that begin to taste of the brutality and the selfishness and the greed and the irrational horror that we are able to invent and pour out on each other.

There's simply nothing like us, if we leave God out of the picture, there is nothing still more able to elicit one another.

There's no illicit wonder in humanity, but also still nothing more able to fill us with utter and complete horror than man's own inability to be far, far worse than any animal has ever been.

[29 : 00] But it becomes gently and quietly that life is cheapened. That it doesn't matter too much how we treat other people because life is about surviving and about being the fittest.

It means that we can constantly change our truth because there is no truth. It means that people aren't made in the image of God and aren't to be respected as such.

And when we lose God from the picture, what we are beginning to do is we are beginning to lose our very humanity. We are beginning to lose the essence of what makes us people when we lose sight with God.

And that's what's happening. And that's why sooner rather than later, it will be very difficult here. If things progress the way they're progressing in these last few years, it will be very difficult to be a Christian without being imprisoned.

Very difficult. I'm not sure how it will happen, but it will become very difficult. Are you going to stand up for being a Christian? Or is it the case that we're going to constantly be rewriting the truth of God to fit in with what society thinks truth is?

[30 : 31] It's a challenge. And it's one we need to be vigilant and prayerful about. It also reminds us not just the catastrophic effect of sin, but also the importance of creation truth.

Creation truth is very important for us. Because when we wake up in the morning, we don't just say, oh my goodness, another day, what a drag.

Well, we probably do. But we remember that this one day, it's God's gift. And we're created for Him to worship and serve. And we're created for Him to be a man's chief end, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

That's why we've been made. And that's why we need a redeemer. And that's why it's important to remember who we were, where we come from, and why a redeemer was needed.

It gives backbone to our morality. It's not just a human construct, the Bible. It's not just a kind of morality through the ages that we were given here.

[31 : 41] It's the morality of the living God who made us and who knows us and who wants the best for us. And if we lose sight of that, if we no longer believe in creation, if creation is just a kind of fairy tale from the past, a bit of a spiritual thinking, then we've lost everything.

Because we've been made in His image to act accordingly as His representatives. And you value the person sitting next to you, not just because they're your friend, not just because they serve you, not just because you're in the same house group, not just because you've never met them before, but you know it's a nice thing to be nice to them, but because they're made in God's image.

And therefore, in reality, to take the unbiblical proverb, we are all Jock Tamsen's parents. We all do come from God.

And we recognize that there's great lostness and separation there, but we recognize the importance of creation, truth, not least in how we treat each other, but also how we treat the environment and also the animal kingdom.

We don't treat them as equals. We don't treat them as superiors. And we don't treat them with brutality. We treat them with love and with respect because of who they are and because God has given them to us.

[33 : 01] The importance of God's truth. And lastly, we see and recognize the bigness of creation. The bigness of creation. Could someone maybe go out to the door? Someone had left.

The bigness of salvation. We need to recognize and we'll see this again, that when humanity turned from God, humanity turned from life.

And everything was broken, as we'll come to see. And therefore Jesus Christ coming is absolutely significant because He's beginning to restore what has been broken and restore this relationship and this love and this trust and this obedience.

But more than that, I believe it's going to be even better. So that as said, one of the funerals this week for the believer, the best, or maybe it was on Sunday, the best is still to come.

And there's a renewal body and soul of the new heavens and the new earth. But we will look at salvation in the light of creation and we'll look at the fall, because it also puts into its right perspective our need of a redeemer.

[34 : 19] So today we give thanks for Jesus Christ because He will be restoring this to us. And this is the core. There's so much that we aren't told here.

There's so much that even in the image bearing, even in the reflection of humanity, God already had planned that His own Son would come through that seed to be the redeemer.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God, help us to understand Your Scripture and recognize that there's much that's mysterious, much that we don't understand, but the clear and simple message and the clear and simple truth that is given is as simple as a child could take it and know and understand what it means.

And grant us the faith to believe that You are the sovereign, that You're behind this world, that You're the Creator God, and give us the trust in You through Jesus Christ our Lord to serve and follow You.

And be with us as we sing our parting psalm of praise for Jesus' sake. Amen.