

Created for Dominion

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- [0 : 0 0] This is the word of the Lord. Let's read it together. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth in the heavens.
- When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land, and was watering the whole face of the ground.
- Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.
- And out of the ground, the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers, and the name of the first is the Peshon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.
- [1 : 0 4] And the gold of that land is good. The Delium and Onyx stone are there. And the name of the second river is the Gihan. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Kush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria, and the fourth river is the Euphrates.
- The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.
- For in the day you eat it, you shall surely die. And then the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground, the Lord God have formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them and whatever the man called every living creature.
- That was its name. And the man gave names to all livestock and to all the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam, there was no, not found a helper fit for him.
- This is God's holy work. We're in a series working through Genesis chapter one and two. And today we come back again for the second time to Genesis chapter two.
- [2 : 1 3] And there's so much in the verses we read. I know I say this all the time. There's so much here. There's so much we can't talk about today that's here. One of the things we won't get to look at today is the covenant that God made without him in Eve and the tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life.
- So we're gonna look at that in our first week on Genesis three in February. So come back February first Sunday and we'll cover the covenant in the two trees.

But Genesis chapter two is a second way of looking at the creation story from Genesis one. And it's sort of a close up view, a narrowing the lens, whereas Genesis one is a broad view of all that God did in the creation week.

Genesis two hones in and looks at more specific details in the creation week and gives us sort of a different angle. And one of the ways that scholars and theologians and the church have talked about Genesis two for centuries is that it really does explain the image of God that we read about at the end of Genesis chapter one.

And so last week we talked about the fact that part of what it means to be made in the image of God is we were made for God to be in relationship with God, a deep relationship and that we're made for Sabbath, which really means ultimately to enter into God's rest.

[3 : 28] And this week we look at the next aspect of what it means to be made in the image of God through this word that we get in Genesis 126, dominion, that then is explained I think a little bit more in the details of Genesis chapter two.

And so there are really three words that you need to understand and to live into this call that we all have as God's image bearers to take dominion as God puts it in Genesis one.

And the three words are this, the word culture, work and power. Three things we all have in our call to culture, work and power.

And that's what this concept of dominion means. So let's think about that together. First, culture. If you have a Bible, you can flip back with me just a couple of verses to chapter one, verse 26, where it says that God made us in his image.

So we all have dignity made in God's image every single human no matter what they believe in. And then the very next line is, and let humans have dominion over the fish, over the birds, over the heavens, over the sky, the sea and the land.

[4 : 36] And so the closest clause to the word image is let them have dominion. And so we know that dominion is very important for what it means to talk about the image.

And this word dominion is a royal term. So it's a term of kingship and queenship. It's a term that says that we participate in God's royal rule over all of creation as sons and daughters of the king, human beings.

That we have a royal stewardship over everything that God has made as the pinnacle creature of creation. And there's a second verb just after that that helps explain it as well. And it's down in verse 28, and it's the verb God says, and God blessed them and he said to be fruitful and multiply and then he tells them to subdue.

And subdue, to subdue the land, subdue the earth is another way of talking about dominion. And really it's a verb of service and stewardship. So it means to take all the stuff that God has made and given us and use it for the purposes that God has given us to use it for in this world.

So in other words, it's to take nature, the natural world and form nature into a garden. That's taking dominion and subduing. And that's one of the basic ways we image God into the world.

[5 : 53] We're royal, we have a royal stewardship over all of creation and over all the things that God's made. Now, this has been called for a long time now the cultural mandate, the cultural mandate, mandate, the command of God to make culture.

Genesis 1, 26 to 28 explained in Genesis chapter two. And it's the command that we've just looked at to rule, to subdue, to take dominion over sky, sea and land, over the birds and the fish and all the creatures.

And it's not domination, never domination, dominion, a different concept. And another way to say it is we're called to be, as human beings, to be culture makers in this world.

That's the cultural mandate. What does that mean? When we think about the word culture, probably some of us will think about being a cultured person. So you'll think about people who go to symphonies at Usher Hall.

You'll think about people who read a lot of books. You'll think about posh culture, to be cultured. And that's, we use it that way, but that's not really what the word means. Culture just comes from the concept of cultivation.

[7 : 00] And we're from the very beginning as human beings called to take the stuff that God made and cultivate the world, to make more stuff out of it. And so we cultivate our households, we cultivate gardens.

Some of you enjoy cultivating spreadsheets. It's a culture I don't understand, but I know it's good and we need it. These are all different ways we cultivate. We're culture makers.

That's what it means to take dominion and subdue. And so every single one of us today, if you are a human being, no matter what you believe in, you are called to be a culture maker, to take the stuff that God has given you, the stuff that God has made from nothing and use it and wield it into new stuff, in all sorts of different ways.

And that can mean taking dishes from the dishwasher and putting them into the cabinet. That's cultivation. That can mean inventing the iPhone, right? Only one or two people can talk about it. That type of cultivation, but it's all cultivation.

It's culture making. And we're all called to do it. So dominion, as the image of God, you're called to be a culture maker. Now, when you come to chapter two, if you look at chapter two really carefully, it's a closer look into that and another way of seeing it.

[8 : 10] And so from verse four, where we started reading, we have the lines, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth. This is the beginning sentence of the overall structure of the book of Genesis.

So Genesis is actually structured with an introduction, creation, up to chapter two, verse three. And then the rest of Genesis is formed by 10 genealogies. And every one of those genealogies starts as, these are the generations of.

And so here it says, first genealogy, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth. So we're about to get the story, the first character, the heavens and the earth, material. The first character that the book focuses on is the material land, the sky, the sea.

And if you were to keep reading the book of Genesis, you would find in chapter five, verse one, these are the generations of Adam. Chapter six, verse nine, these are the generations of Noah.

Chapter 10, these are the generations of the sons of Noah and so on and so forth, 10 different times. That's how the whole book is structured. That means we're being told in chapter two, the very first character, the very first story is a genealogy of the land itself, the heavens and the earth.

[9 : 20] And then right after that in verse five to seven, and when you realize that it's not surprising, we're told when there was no bush of the field, no plant yet, no rain coming down, no human yet, to take care of the heavens and the earth, to irrigate the land, God raised up a human being.

And so immediately we're saying, oh, the story of the heavens and the earth, the land is a story of the human relationship to the material world. And how was Adam formed? The first human was formed, we're told, out of the matter, the dust, the stuff of the ground.

And if you were here a couple of weeks ago, we said that the word Adam, which is exactly that word in Hebrew, A-D-A-M, Adam, is here followed by a word that sounds just like Adam in Hebrew.

So when it says God raised Adam from the dust of the ground, the Hebrew word is Adamah, A-D-A-M-A-H. And so the story of the heavens and the earth, you hear that connection?

That human beings were, Adam was raised from the Adamah, that we are a people made from the ground, for the ground, for the land, to rule and take dominion, to subdue the earth, that tight interconnection between us and our material surroundings all around us.

[10 : 37] We're embodied creatures, we've been saying that throughout the series. And then right after that, in verse 10 to 14, it's interesting why in the midst of this creation story, would all of a sudden God give us this text that says, and by the way, there's bedelium and onyx stone and gold in that land.

And also there's these four rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. And that's next to what you know, early readers as a Syria. And we're being told all of this geographical data.

And why in the world are we being talked about in the creation story about rivers and onyx stone? And it's because we were made for the land and the land was made for us. And that means when there are rivers and they intersect, you can put a boat on a river that intersects and you can send stuff away.

And you can create commerce and markets. And you can take onyx stone and bedelium and gold. And you can beat it into materials that will create other stuff.

And ultimately you can build a city. You see, chapter two is explicating the reality of how much we are meant from the beginning to be culture makers. And that the story of Christianity does not begin in Genesis three.

[11 : 47] It begins in Genesis one and two where God made this world to be with us and us to be with this world, to be workers full of delight and fruition. This is where our story begins.

And this is the thing that we are being healed toward in Christianity. It all starts right here. And so if you just scan your eyes across this chapter, it's so earthy.

It's place centric. There are bushes in the field, lands and plants and rain, and irrigation and man working the ground and the mist, the dust, the breath, the nostrils, the garden, the east, organic growth, trees, food, rivers, gold, bedelium, onyx stone, fertility, place names, Tigris, Euphrates, Assyria, Kush, it's geography.

And that means that we're being told here that we are made to use the stuff God made and be culture makers. Tolkien, the writer of the Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien, he wrote a famous letter, letter number 153 in his series of letters, the book that comprises his letters.

Then he wrote this letter to a man called Peter Hastings, who was a Roman Catholic bookshop owner in Oxford. And Peter loved the Lord of the Rings in the early days when they just came out.

[13 : 04] But he wrote to Tolkien upset and he said that one of the mistakes in the Lord of the Rings was that he, Tolkien gave too much power, he thought, to Gandalf, Tom Bombadil, and Treebeard, one of the ents.

And he said, when I read the book, these characters have too much power. They can create things, they can wield the world in a way that feels God-like. And he was upset about that. He said, it actually seems that in your world, you're taking power away from God and giving it to creatures.

And Tolkien responded to him in a very fan, this letter's very famous for a word that Tolkien coined. And it's the word sub-creator or sub-creation.

And this is what Tolkien said. He said, first off, Peter, it's fiction. Okay? So don't take it too seriously. Second off, Tolkien said, I'm a sub-creator and so are you.

And in my story, these characters are sub-creators. And sub-creators means that they are not able to make something out of nothing, but they are in their own world able to take the things God made and wield them into something else great.

[14 : 15] And he said, and that's how I see myself in creating this legendarium, the Lord of the Rings. I'm a sub-creator. And he said, so I made languages, but I did not invent language. I named plant, I created new plants and animals that don't exist in our world, but I did not create the concept of plant and animal.

We are sub-creators. We are little world makers. We build things and create things and Tolkien coined that word for us. That's who you are. Now, secondly, the second word you need, and we have to hurry today on our busy schedule this morning, that means that if we're culture makers, made to make culture, made to take dominion and subdue and to wield things into new things, that the second word is, we just call that work.

That's just work. So we were made for work. So we cultivate households, we cultivate marketplaces, we cultivate spreadsheets, we cultivate classrooms full of kids, right?

And all of that is work. And that's the word we use. And so down in verse 15, you see God say that, the Lord God took Adam, the man, and he put him in the Garden of Eden, and he gave him a job, work it and keep it.

And so from the very beginning, when the first things were told, and is that we were made for work, culture making expresses itself through our vocations, our work. And I know that come back in February, we will talk about the priestly element of the verbs to work it and to keep it.

[15 : 40] But today, just focused on work. God commands this of Adam and Eve from the very beginning. Now, that just simply means first, work is good.

Work was made good. And we live in a very broken world, Genesis three is coming, but work was created good. What kind of work is good? God made Adam here out of the dust of the earth.

He got, God dug into the world, into the soil, and made Adam. And that means that from the very beginning, God got his hands dirty and in a good way, in the way that the soil is so good.

And that means that the first thing we see is that manual work is very good. In our city, which is very high and lofty, we are the most educated city in the United Kingdom, per capita.

And that means for most of us, many of us in this room are knowledge workers. And sometimes in a culture like ours, knowledge work can look down upon manual work and manual labor.

[16 : 45] And actually, the very first thing we see in the beginning of human history is that God says, you were made so good, manual labor is so good. There's no such thing as hierarchy in this.

There's never any space for us to look down on any type of worker as long as that work is not sinful. All, this is a bit of a truism, but all non-simple work is good.

And there's nothing that looks more like Genesis too, perhaps, in a sinful and broken world than the janitorial service that comes to our streets every single morning and picks up the rubbish that was left overnight.

Beautifying, cleansing the space, bringing order back from chaos from the night before. There's nothing that looks more like Genesis too, in a broken and fallen world than a job like that.

And so here we see that work is good, manual work is good, knowledge work is good. Boy, spreadsheets are good, but we also need crops more than spreadsheets, amen.

[17 : 41] We gotta eat. We all started this way. We all started this way. And how does this go right? How can you take this reality into whatever sphere of work you've been called to and do well by culture making, by the way God's created you as God's image bearer?

Let me give you a few things. One, first, be aware of how quickly this goes wrong. We're in a sinful world, but there are twin ditches here. And the twin ditches are the one we looked at last week.

The problem we all have, many of us have, of overwork. And so last week we said, you need to enter into God's rest and stop your working on the Sabbath day. Lay your deadly doings down.

But a more specific way to get at that is the real ditch for many of us in the modern world is that we overwork because we've taken the power of culture making and used it for selfish ambition.

And God in Genesis one says, let us make man in our image. But when you come to Genesis 11, these culture makers who had the power to take bedelium and other stones and build a great tower to the heavens, what did they say at the Tower of Babel?

[18 : 49] They said, let us make a name for ourselves. God said, let us make man in our image to wield their work in a way that honors God. At the Tower of Babel, we said, let us make a name for ourselves with our work.

And so the biggest and first problem we face with culture making is that we in our hearts immediately turn it around and say, thank you for giving us the ability, but now I'm here to build my own little kingdom.

My money, my bank account. I've been called to steward the resources you've given me, but now they're mine. So we build a sky to the heavens, a tower.

We build our own kingdoms. We pursue work through the means of selfish ambition. The other ditch that we can fall into with being a culture maker is one we didn't talk about last time, and that's the opposite problem, which is under work.

And under work in the Bible is called slothfulness, laziness. And this is not a modern productivity conversation. This is biblical. This is all over the proverbs that many of us struggle with overwork, many of us struggle with underwork, and all of us are gonna go in one direction or the other in our lives.

[19 : 58] And so some of us today's, we all need to hear one or the other. Some of us need to hear, six days you show labor and one day you will rest. The command of liberation, because we overwork, we need to be told.

It's a command to rest. Others of us need to be told, one day you rest, but six days you labor. Six days you work, because you were made for that.

And if you're overworking or you're underworking in either direction as a culture maker, you will be unfulfilled. Underwork or overwork, you'll be empty in either direction. Either you're living for yourself and building your own little kingdom, or you're not fulfilling the calling you've been given to actually be a worker that makes things in this world, either direction.

Now let me give you three ways this can go very right. And they're very short. One is this, in verse 15 we're told that God put Adam in the garden and he told him, work and keep the garden, the place I've put you.

That means that God created us as culture makers and he created us as workers and he put us where we are. And that means one way to protect yourself from these twin ditches is to always remember that ultimately God is your boss.

[21 : 08] Your local boss is not your ultimate boss. And maybe that's good news for you today if you don't like your boss. Ultimately God is the one you work for.

And when we can remember in our hearts every day as we go out to work, whether that's household work, gardening work, or the financial district of the city, God is our ultimate boss.

We work for him, we were made to work for him. The second way we can get this right is to realize that this verb, he says work it and keep it. The verb keep there is a verb of organization, beautification and protection.

And that means one of the things we're being called to is in our work, is your work meaningful and fulfilling? One of the things you can ask is, am I working in order to keep it?

Meaning to push back chaos and death in this world in some way to make something more beautiful than it was and to pursue what's good, not evil in this world.

[22 : 09] Is your work in any way participating in that? Then you're fulfilling the thing you were made for. And so maybe that's happening in a way you've not even realized yet in the way you work. And you've got to just wake up to it and embrace it a little more.

So are you an engineer in the room today? Maybe you're an engineer that's working on Northbridge. And let me say, you could go faster maybe?

No, she can't. But you discovered a problem in that bridge and you were making sure it doesn't fall. And that is being a culture maker.

That is fulfilling such a good purpose that you are gonna protect us. That's pushing back the chaos of death. And maybe you're here today as a medical professional in some way, shape or form. And you take the human body and the chaos and the death that's being wielded through brokenness and you push it back through other things in this earth that we've taken, like all sorts of things from the earth and wielded into medicine.

And you push back death and chaos. You're doing it. You're fulfilling what you are made to be as God's image. You're in the law court and you're establishing justice. You're a janitor and we've already said it.

[23 : 23] You're beautifying the city. You're doing exactly what God made you to do. Are you a student? Let me ask you if you're a student today. Do you go to university or school or college or whatever?

And are you there to learn a vocation in order to glorify the Lord with your work and push back death, disease, chaos with goodness, order and beauty in this world?

Or are you there to build your own kingdom? Are you at home, full-time parent right now at home, cleaning up dirty nappies every day? And that's your main gig.

And you're at school in a room full of kids all the time. Boy, you are cultivating the image of God itself, human beings.

And talk about pushing back the chaos, bringing order. Every time you throw away that dirty nappy, you do something that is so good.

[24 : 19] You work and keep, you bring back beauty and order and chaos and cleanliness to a little one that really needs it, to bear the image of God in their own way in time. God put us, God put Adam there.

God has put us where we are. And so there's a calling we all have. And we'll have to talk about gifting and searching for vocation another day. But let me just say it like this and move to the final thing.

We're all called to change the world through culture making in our own way. Not the whole world, not at all, but the little bitty worlds that God has each put us in.

And so there are people that you can reach. There are people you can help. There are spheres, vocational spheres that you can get to and impact that I can never get to.

People that I will never be able to have a relationship with that only you and your small world, just like me and my small world, have an ability to change. Are you going in the name of the Lord to glorify God as your ultimate boss, to be a culture maker towards the good in wherever God has put you?

[25 : 32] Lastly, that means as we close that we have all been given this third thing. And that's that if you've been called to make culture in this world, if you've been therefore called to work in whatever way God has given you, you have power.

And power is something we all possess. In the academy today, it's very popular to say that power is bad, period. And of course, that's obviously not true, that all of us wield power in all sorts of ways.

And the question is, are we doing a good job with our power or poor job? At the end of this passage, Adam is given the opportunity by God to name the animals.

Of course, God could have named the animals. But he actually said, Adam, I want you to do it. And Adam was given this opportunity to name.

And in Hebrew, when you name something, you really define its essence. You set it apart for what it's going to be and do. There's this sense here of domestication.

[26 : 34] And God gifted Adam this enormous power. I can't imagine what it must have been like. We all have been gifted power in different ways.

And in that, we've got power that we have to assess, are we wielding it in the name of the Lord for the good of the city? In the name of our household for the good of our household.

In the name of the Lord for the good of our household, I should say. How are you using your power? There's power in your money, but we can quickly misuse it by becoming greedy.

And you can take through greed the power of money and turn it into a great oppressive evil. There is power in sex and sexuality. In the balance of covenant marriage, but you can quickly take the gift of sex and sexuality, a power and abuse it so quickly that it will destroy you.

There is great power in work itself, but we can wield our work and selfish ambition and use it in a way where we become power hungry. And it becomes an idol in our lives.

[27 : 38] And we wield it to utter destruction in the lives of so many people. It happens in every sphere. It happens in every sphere. How do you wield your power that God's given you over a few or over many in this life?

Today you've got to come and you've got to look at the one we're told in the New Testament is the image bearer himself, Jesus Christ. And if we look at his life for just a couple of minutes as we close, Jesus Christ is the ultimate culture maker, the human being, the image of God itself.

And when you look at his life, you think about it, how did he wield his power? Called by God to work, he was. And he came into this world, and first he came into an existing culture.

We all have subcultures, Edinburgh culture and Glasgow culture and all sorts of things. Jesus came into Jewish culture in the first century. He would have been known as Yeshua Bar Joseph, Jesus the son of Joseph when he came to the synagogue.

And he learned the Old Testament, he memorized it. He learned to do his chores. He became a carpenter, he worked. We don't know a lot about his carpentry skills, but what we do know is that Jesus never overworked or underworked.

[28 : 59] We know he was a carpenter who worked in exactly the right way he should have throughout his life. He was a culture maker. You know, think about the things that Jesus has given the world culturally. He gave us the parable of the Good Samaritan.

He gave us the parable of the prodigal son. He gave us this whole genre. He gave us eating with tax collectors and sinners in a world that did not allow that. He disrupted and remade the culture.

Jesus Christ ultimately offered the world by his death and resurrection the culture of the very kingdom of God that has come and is coming. He remade the world. He gave us the culture of Sabbath in a new way, in a way that Sainsbury's on Sunday opens later and closes earlier and they don't know why.

And it's because of Jesus Christ. They used to stay closed all day, but they still do it different. And it's because Jesus changed the world. He made a new culture and that means if you look to him, I think there's one word that really encapsulate true work, culture making.

And that's Jesus's example of servanthood. He said, I came not to be served but to serve. And if there's one way you can use your culture making power in this life is become a servant.

[30 : 12] Look to Christ. And who among us today can say, I've taken the power God has given me, the vocational calling God has given me, the people God has put in my sphere, my calling to work and to wield my resources and has done that as a servant to the glory of God fully.

Now you think about the way you've worked, the way you've stewarded your household, the way you've stewarded the marketplace, the way you treat your own money. Who among us can say, boy, my work reflects Genesis too and the example of Jesus Christ?

And when you think about the greatest bit of culture, Jesus ever offered this world. The greatest thing that Jesus ever did for us is that the image of God himself, the one with true power, the utter culture maker himself, he came into this world ultimately not just to make culture but to be unmade by culture.

The culture of crucifixion, God gave us this power to create, we built crosses. God gave us this power to wield, we created cultures of death and destruction and Jesus came to be subdued by the cross, to be subdued by every act of selfish ambition that we did in this world in order to remake us, to renew us, to set us back to rights with him and say now go and work in the way you were made, to be remade, he was unmade so that we could be remade in the way we are culture makers into this world.

And so today as you leave, how do you go forth and work in the light of Jesus Christ? You've got to be changed, you've got to be renewed, you've got to admit I have not wielded my resources, I've abused my power in ways, I've not done what I should do but Jesus Christ was unmade so I could be changed.

[32 : 09] And from there, Jesus restores us to stewardship of servanthood. Become a servant all around you in whatever power you have and you will walk in the way of Christ.

The lines of the Jude doxology to close, to the only God our savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion and authority.

Before all time now and forever, amen. Let's pray. Father, we give thanks for the gift of culture making and we ask Lord that you would today remake us to wield that gift in the ways that actually serve the world as we were made.

That we would be here to build a great city, that we would be here ultimately to shine through our work, your glory and point to you. We thank you Lord Jesus for the cross and the resurrection that you came to serve us all the way to the point of death so that we might understand what it means to be pardoned and renewed unto true servanthood.

And so we ask for that gift today, that vision and we pray it in Jesus' name, amen.