

Being Human - What Does God Say About Our Bodies

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] right at the very beginning in Genesis 1. You can find that on the third page of your Bible. This is verse 26 to 31.

And then from there we'll jump to Psalm 139, verses 1 to 6 and 13 to 18. Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind 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 increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, I give you every seed-bearing tree plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground, everything that has breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.

[1 : 30] And so it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise.

You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in from behind and before, and you lay your hands upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful.

[2 : 33] I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God.

How vast is the sum of them. Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. Thank you, Matt, for reading.

And if we've not met before, my name is Martin Ayers. I'm the lead pastor here. And Andy very helpfully prayed for us before our Bible reading.

So we'll just dive in. And our normal practice as a church is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, so that we let God set the agenda and we don't miss out the bits of the Bible that we find particularly challenging or difficult for us.

[3 : 46] So that's our normal way of working as a church and our regular diet. We just had series over the summer in John's Gospel and 1 Samuel. In the evenings at the moment, we're in Exodus.

Soon we'll be in Colossians in the mornings. But from time to time, it can be really helpful to look at what the Bible says as a whole about a particular theme.

And last week, we started a series on the hugely important topic of being human. We're asking, who am I? What does it mean to be human? And we're doing that because it's a question being asked in the world all around us.

And when we turn to the Bible, we find answers that are clear and compelling, whether we're just exploring the Christian faith and we're looking in, or whether we're someone who already is a

Christian and we're thinking about how we want to go out and live our lives confidently, lives that flourish, and we're able to speak to others in the confusion around us about what it means to be human.

So, last week, if you missed it, I'd encourage you to pick up the talk from last week on our website. You can catch up because it was so foundational to the series that's coming that we saw that when we're looking at what it means to be human, we don't look at our own capacity and ability.

[5 : 04] We look first and foremost at what God says about us. And God has said to every human being that we are made in his image. We have the dignity of being royalty.

God has said to each human being they're made in the image of God. This morning, then, what does God say about our bodies? That's what we're looking at. And as we look, we're going to jump around the Bible a bit, but there'll be, hopefully you'll see, verses on the screen.

It's a good test of Ian at the back as he's going to put up verses as we look at them and you can have your Bibles to hand. But what does the world say? Well, the world says about our bodies, some people say, your body is everything.

In our times, we are bombarded by thousands of images every day advertising things and often accompanied by images of beautiful people.

And you walk down a high street, whether it's Saracen Street or Anisland Cross or another high street in our city, and what kind of shops do we see around us? We see tanning shops, we see beauty parlors, we see hair salons, we see barbers, we see gyms, tattoo artists.

[6 : 17] Your body is everything. Make it look how you want it to. Some of the fastest growing industries today are for beauty products, skin care, male grooming, cosmetic surgery, all aimed at making you look better and making you look younger.

My barber is urging me to go to Iran. He says, Martin, if you go to Iran, they'll put you to sleep and they'll take all the hair from around here and they'll put it up here and you'll be like a new man, he says.

Yeah. And the actor James Nesbitt did that and not in Iran, but he said that when he had a hair transplant, suddenly he started getting work again because the world wants you to look young and beautiful.

your body's at everything. But also, we're told at the same time, your bodies are nothing. They're not who we really are. There's a real you on the inside of you and you have to discover what you are on the inside and you have to express that and if you find that your body doesn't match who you feel you are on the inside, then you change your body.

There's like a plasticity to our bodies. Now one way we see that, just in a cultural trend, is in the trend to have a tattoo or have tattoos.

[7 : 37] So don't mishear me. I don't think there's anything morally wrong about getting tattoos. I think for a Christian, it is a matter of indifference. It's neither right nor wrong whether you want to have tattoos.

It's fine. But it's striking how popular they now are compared with 20 years ago. Loads and loads of people have tattoos. Now why is that?

Sometimes it's because of a narrative that says my body is like a blank canvas. Who I really am is on the inside and I need to make a statement.

I need to communicate to the world who I am so I'll put some words or an image on my body in a tattoo that communicates something about who I really am.

And with that, there's this sense that my body is just this kind of this thing I occupy. But if people need to know who I really am, I need to make a statement in some way. So what does God say about our bodies?

[8 : 36] Well, first of all, your body is a good gift. It is essential to who you are. And we see that in the creation account in the Bible. Genesis chapter 2 verse 7 it says this, Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.

Now the key here is that God created Adam physically and then breathed life into him. So there is no real you before you had a body.

It's not that you were a person or a soul and then you kind of were given a body. your body is essential to who you are as a person. Your body isn't everything.

So God starts in Genesis 2 with a physical body and then he breathes into the nostrils the breath of life. It's not every, it's not, so your body isn't the totality of who you are but our bodies are essential to who we are.

My body is not like a space suit that I have to put on to keep me alive. It's not something that we occupy. Like a house or a flat we live in or a deck chair that we sit in at the beach.

[9 : 51] We want to think about, when we want to think about what makes us who we are, we are body and soul. And in this life we can't separate those things from one another.

We can't say, oh well that bit was my body bit and this bit is my soul bit. God made us physical with ligaments and hormones and bodily hair and sweat glands and we can't get away from it and it's who we are.

And your body is a good gift. So we see that in David's meditation on all that God knows in Psalm 139. So if we just turn back there, if you've fallen close, page 628, it's this amazing psalm as David meditates.

And notice this is after Genesis 3. So it's after the fall, it's after sin has entered our world, it's after our bodies have become mortal and death is in our world. But David looks at his body in a fallen world and he says, I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

If we have a look at verse 13, for you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

[11 : 05] Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. So when we reflect on the human bodies that each of us has been given, there's an appropriate way to have a sense of awe, a sense of wonder at the human body as a created gift.

So we sometimes think of our bodies like we think of our hand at cards. When we're playing a card game, you know, you get your hand dealt out and you look at your cards and you think, oh, what have I been given?

Are they good cards? Are they bad cards? And if they're bad cards, kind of, oh, I didn't deserve this. What have I done to get these bad cards? We know in our family, there's one member of our family where we know if they've got a bad hand at cards because we give out the cards and when they look at them they go, after this game, can we play another game?

Can we do one more? And ah, bad hand. So that's how we can sometimes think of our bodies. We can think, oh, when we think about our noses, our ears, our body shape, oh man, why did I get this set of cards?

But Psalm 139 is telling us there are no accidents with God. Verse 13 says, he knit you together in your mother's womb. You were thoughtfully made, you were knowingly made, you were deliberately made.

[12 : 23] Lots of us live in the West End. Others of us come into the West End for church and when we're here we might visit an artisan coffee shop or an artisan bakery and when you buy an artisan pastry, what artisan means is not just more expensive and a weird shape, it means that what you buy has been individually made and not mechanically made.

It's been crafted with traditional methods. Well, our God is the ultimate artisan and he has made each of us individually, thoughtfully and wonderfully.

So when we hear the word spiritual, we're not to think of that word as meaning not physical or immaterial as though our physicality is something that we need to escape from and one day finally we'll retreat to a higher plane where we'll be non-material spirits floating about on clouds in heaven. Rather, God approves thoroughly of the physicality of his creation and he's not giving up on it. Having a body is essential to who we are.

Again, our bodies are not everything. We know that from very recent weeks at St. Silas. If you were with us when we looked at 1 Samuel, what happens in 1 Samuel is the people judge by human outward appearance and they want Saul as their king because he's tall and big and God corrects that and says man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart and when it says that it doesn't mean we know it doesn't mean the organ that pumps blood around our body when the Bible talks about the heart it's talking about who we are on the inside our loves our desires our values that affect the choices that we make.

[14 : 18] God is deeply concerned about that about who we are on the inside. Now sometimes the Bible uses the word soul in different ways when you're reading the Bible sometimes when you read the word soul it just means a living person so it means everything that you are body spirit and mind in 1 Peter chapter 1 there's an example of that the word soul being used in that wholesome way

other times the Bible uses the word soul to describe something distinct from our bodies so when someone dies as a Christian before the return of Christ their soul goes to be with God in heaven but I hope I never get to heaven in the sense that heaven is like the waiting room for our souls with God before we are united with resurrection bodies on the new earth so even in this life when we think about our soul and our body being distinct parts of who we are it's not that we can separate them out and when you think about it we see that in life don't we because when you think about when you really love something or when you really hate something our reactions are physical to that and the hormones that we have the feelings that we get about our loves and our hates are part of our body and not just something that we can cut off and we see in Genesis 2 and Psalm 139 that God made our bodies good we should be able to thank God for the unique body he has given to each of us he made your body deliberately thoughtfully knowingly lovingly wonderfully and we receive our bodies as a gift from him now there are lots of implications of this but one for our times is how it speaks to us about gender and gender theory we saw last week from Genesis 1 that when it says and we just had it read again when it says that God made us in his image it's male and female that he created us in his image there's something about being made male and female that is essential to being made in the image of God and because our bodies are part of who we are and not just something that we occupy being male or female is something that is biologically grounded and not psychologically determined we might express it very differently whether we're a man we might how we express being a man might be very different to other men or if we're a woman likewise we might express our femininity very differently to other women at the same time that maleness and femaleness is a given for us biologically determined and through our bodies so to destabilize that foundation for our children by saying that there are many genders and that you can be a girl or a boy trapped in the wrong body it's not a loving thing to do that is a confusing thing to tell children we know that there are people who feel very deeply a distress that they feel that their body doesn't match the gender that they feel that they are inside and we should feel deep compassion for people in that situation if you're here this morning and that's how you feel about the body that you have we feel deep compassion for you to be in that kind of distress but the answer to that dysphoria is not to try and change our bodies to match how we feel inside not to try and sort of remold or manipulate our bodies with hormones or with surgery our bodies are part of who we are as God has made us and for all of us what we're hearing is that our bodies were made good by a good God thoughtfully deliberately lovingly now that might be

something that any of us might need help with to be thankful for the bodies we've been given and we can ask God to help us to be able to give thanks for the body he has given us we can talk to a trusted friend about feelings of sadness we have about our bodies and pray with them about wanting to be thankful for the things that are good about our bodies but this is good news you were not dealt a random set of cards when you got whatever you got your dad's nose your mum's eyelashes your grandma's shortness or your grandpa's tallness God planned for you and he values you and your body is a gift from him secondly and more briefly your body is broken we see that all over the Bible after Genesis chapter 3 if we just turn to Romans in Romans chapter 5 we get a glimpse of that on page 1132 of the Bible Romans chapter 5 verse 12 it talks about what's gone wrong with our world page 1132

Romans 5 12 the Apostle Paul says therefore just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin and in this way death came to all people because all sinned and so we live in a world where our bodies have been ravaged by the effect of sin as humanity has turned from God death has entered our world and here principally when Paul talks about death he principally means that we don't know God that is death to us but physically our bodies have become bodies that die over the page Romans chapter 8 we get it on the screen as well chapter 8 verse 20 it says the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it and this makes a profound difference to how we experience our bodies and how we think about our bodies that they are frustrated that they are mortal our bodies bear the marks of a world that is not the way it should be things about our bodies do not work as they were meant to because the whole of creation is like that some of that is true from the moment that we were born then as we grow older even things about our bodies that used to be really good stop working as well as they used to and we stop looking like we used to because our bodies are now mortal bodies and I remember as young as in my early 20s a guy I played squash with having a problem with his elbow and he went to the doctor and then him telling me you know the doctor said

I might never fully recover and we were shocked what in your 20s you might never recover this is life this is life your body is a good gift but your body is broken and the challenge for us as Christians is not to kind of land in one of these first two points and only think oh yeah my body is good no my body is terrible what we have to do is live out both these things in full at the same time we give thanks for our bodies we trust that they are they were given to us by a good God and he knows what he's doing and at the same time there are things that we lament about our bodies in a world that's marked by sin suffering and death and Jesus knows what that's like this is our third point Jesus willingly took a body so we're going to see that in John chapter 1 John chapter 1 you can the verses will come on the screen again but you can turn there if you'd like 1063 in the church bibles and in John chapter 1 the apostle John starts by telling us mind blowing truths about the eternal son of God and he calls him the word so John chapter 1 verse 1 in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was with God in the beginning through him all things were made extraordinary so the son of God is eternal he is pre-existing and he is the creator of us our bodies and souls but then we read verse 14 the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us

Jesus took a body and a soul he is born a vulnerable baby wrapped up by his mother to keep him warm he had nose hairs and kneecaps and adrenaline Jesus went through puberty and his voice would have broken he would have had goosebumps when he was cold when he ran he would have got out of breath and he came so that God could save us body and soul Jesus coming is God's great yes to his creation if you think about how Jesus carries out his ministry in Mark chapters 1 and 2 people come to Jesus with all kinds of brokenness and Jesus doesn't rescue them out of their bodies out of their physicality no he restores their flesh and makes it free from trouble the blind can see the lame can walk the leper is cleansed even the dead are raised to live life in the bodies [23 : 51] God made for them and Jesus can only do this because he has come to suffer in his body in our place we read that he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross this is the greatest compliment the human body could ever have been paid Sam Albury says this in his book about our bodies Jesus became what he valued enough to redeem and it means Jesus knows the difficulty of having a weak body in a broken world he can sympathize with us about the limitations of our bodies he was thirsty he was lonely he was tortured he was suffocated shamed he experienced what it's like to die and then he rose and he still has a body now when he ascended into heaven he didn't jettison his body you know like a space shuttle fires off its rocket boosters that have enabled them to get out of the earth's gravity when it gets up there

Jesus is not like that Jesus is reigning in heaven with a body and he will return with a body to reign over the new heaven and the new earth so let's think about some implications of that the first is that our bodies matter the apostle Paul is very clear on this when he writes to the church in Corinth they seem to have fallen for a teaching that said because who I am is spiritual and that's what God is concerned with my spiritual life it doesn't matter what I do with my body so they were they were willing to be very immoral with their physical bodies because they felt that's not really me and if we might find ourselves thinking a bit like that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 is astonishing he says this 1 Corinthians 6 19 do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you whom you have received from God you are not your own you were bought at a price therefore honour God with your bodies what we do with our bodies really matters to God another implication of this is that embodied friendships matter lots of us learnt this in the pandemic maybe in ways that we'd taken for granted before that suddenly when we were isolated in our homes we learnt how to use

Zoom and we learnt how to meet people and stand two metres from them but we deeply missed what we'd taken for granted which is just physically being present with people touching them when we see them our society in Glasgow I was looking last week you can hire a professional hugger just to come and give you the physical affection that you crave you can go to cuddle workshops in Glasgow where people come together to meet these physical needs that they feel our society is sex obsessed and touch deprived and God's word affirms the goodness of our physicality so that we should be aware of those needs in ourselves and in others around us and look for appropriate ways with their permission to look after people around us like that sometimes I see that when I come away from church that I see women from our church arm in arm

I see guys who are physically holding each other and it's great to see that that sense of affirming our physicality one way that we can do that is just prioritising meeting up physically with our friends

rather than always interacting through our phones and online where we can thinking let's meet up and get in the same room as each other and it's good to be aware of how the online world is distorting that reality for lots of us Matthew Haight in his book *The Anxious Generation* writes as a psychologist about the dangers of socialising in an online world disproportionately too much and he talks about how when you meet people online those relationships are disembodied it doesn't actually matter how you look and how the person looks it doesn't matter where they are in the world they could even be artificial intelligence and you're interacting with them online and our relationships with them are often very disposable so if someone you're interacting with online says something that you don't like you can just exit the format in which you're communicating with them and never have contact with them again now these relationships are replacing for lots of people in just a few years the ways that for thousands of years human beings have learned to interact with each other where our relationships are embodied and we interact with a person in a way where we pick up on non-verbal cues we see their gestures we touch one another and when someone disagrees with us or says something we don't like we have to grow in the skills of reconciliation so the online world is fundamentally inadequate to meet our deeply human need for physical embodied friendship relationships and relationship and that means that in our times in the church we have a real opportunity to be distinctive in that to meet that need as we are a group of people who prioritize embodied relationships across generations that when we're at church and we're enjoying coffee time before and after the service or we're meeting in each other's homes for food we put our phones away and our screens away and we focus on who is in the room with me another implication of all of this is that embodied worship matters when we come together for church we're not just brains on sticks that need to be filled with information to go away with God gathers us in the same physical place and our physical presence is a gift to the others around us so when God's word commands us to sing it commands us to sing to each other as well as to God so that the gospel the message about Christ dwells among us richly Jesus has given us communion and baptism such physical expressions of his promises because he knows that we need to engage more than just our brains in worship five times in the New Testament we're commanded greet one another with a holy kiss and I know we don't do that now and culturally we you know sometimes people joke it's kind of greet one another with a sideways hug now in the church but the early church saw that as a fundamental part of corporate worship the holy kiss and they even had to bring out guidelines the early church of how to make sure that wasn't misused or abused that it was a sacred part of gathering together as an expression of physical community and how it matters and I guess our examples of that are the moment in our services when we say well let's turn and greet one another is a moment where we express physical embodied relationship when we share the peace when we have communion some of us find those bits of the service hard but it's good that they're hard they move us to move across to one another in a helpful way and when Hebrews chapter 10 talks about meeting one another and not giving up on meeting together it says we should do that all the more as we reflect on how the day of Jesus is approaching the day of his return so that's our final point this morning it's that your body will be glorified let's just see that together in Philippians chapter 3 if we turn there so Philippians chapter 3 is on page 1180 and the apostle Paul is writing to this church in Philippi and he talks about how some people when they don't follow the Lord they will just live to satisfy the cravings of their body so chapter 3 verse 18 he says many live as enemies of the cross of Christ and then chapter 3 verse 19 their destiny is destruction their God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame their mind is set on earthly things so see what he's saying when you take God away you do just live to gratify the cravings of your body in whatever way that might be but then he calls us to see how Christians are different verse 20 but our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there the Lord Jesus Christ who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body so when we see Jesus he will have a glorious body

[33 : 26] I take it he will look somewhat like Peter James and John saw him when they went up the mountain and he was transfigured and he was blindingly brilliantly bright in his glory and the Bible talks about Jesus' resurrection body as the first fruit of a harvest our hope isn't one day to escape this physical world and be free of our mortal bodies rather our hope is that when Jesus returns if we're trusting him he will transform our bodies to be glorified resurrection bodies bodies that are liberated from decay and everlasting and we can enjoy living body and soul to please him and know him forever so we might look in the mirror and see wrinkles and middle age spread or signs of aging

and groan about our mortal bodies but as Christians we can always groan in hope in full confidence as Romans 8:23 says we wait eagerly for adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies so let me finish before we pray with the words of C.S. Lewis about this he writes about this as he compares our bodies now with what they will become these small and perishable bodies we now have were given to us as ponies are given to school boys we must learn to manage not that we may someday be free of horses altogether but that someday we may ride bareback confident and rejoicing those great mounts those wings shining and world shaking horses which perhaps even now expect us with patience pawing and snorting in the king's stables let's pray together heavenly father we thank you that you made us body and soul that you made us faithfully wonderfully individually deliberately may you enable us to live in the security of knowing that you don't make mistakes that we are royalty made in your image and we are our bodies as well as our souls teach us to be thankful for all that is good about our bodies and where we see in our bodies the marks of our brokenness our sinfulness our mortality move us we pray to run to Christ and groan inwardly in full confident hope for the day when he appears and transforms our bodies to be like his glorious body for we ask in Jesus name

Amen