

Being Human - Made in the Image of God

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[0 : 0 0] There are two readings today. The first reading, which is on page 3 of the Church Bible, is from Genesis 1, 26-28.

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. The second reading is from Psalm 8 on page 546 of the Church Bible.

Lord our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

[1 : 2 6] You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet, all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord our God, Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! This is the word of the Lord. Lord our God, Lord, and the earth. Amen. Thanks, Lakshmi, for reading that.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet this morning. So if you just turn in your notice sheet, that will help you just follow what we're doing as we look at this theme together.

[2 : 4 3] Let's pray and ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your words that reveals to us who you are and who we are. And we ask that this morning you will fulfill your promise in the Psalms to us that the unfolding of your word will give light and it will enlighten our path.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, it's our normal practice at St. Silas to work through books of the Bible chapter by chapter.

That's our regular diet as a church. And we think that is a really healthy diet for a church to have because we just did a series in 1 Samuel. Earlier in the year, we looked at John's Gospel.

Next, we're going to be looking at Colossians in some weeks' time. And it means that we're letting God set the agenda and we're not missing out parts of the Bible we find challenging or difficult. But from time to time, it's good to see what the Bible says as a whole about a particular theme.

And this morning, we're going to start a six-part series on the question of what it means to be human. We're doing that because it is massively topical, not just in the church, but out there in the world.

[3 : 57] Who am I? What does it mean to be human? It's central to questions that people around us are asking. What is our purpose as human beings? What is our life really for?

When does life begin? When does it end? Is it ever appropriate for us as humans to enable someone to end their life? How should we relate to our bodies?

How many genders are there? And is it okay for someone who is born male, but feels deep down inside their female, to compete in elite sport against women?

And what about artificial intelligence? As we move towards a time, very soon probably, when the machines that we create are phenomenally more capable than humans.

Should they have rights that are protected? What are humans other than simply complex machines? Should humans have rights if there are machines we make that are more capable than us?

[4 : 59] So if we want to know how to make sense of life, how to thrive, how to be successful, we have to be able to answer with confidence these kind of questions. Who am I?

What does it mean to be human? And in our times, we find ourselves a bit like Jason Bourne. If you've seen those movies, there was a trilogy of great movies about Jason Bourne where he woke up at the beginning of the first one with no memory of who he was and he had to kind of piece together who am I?

And our society is a bit like that with this question about humanity. And we'll find today, and in the coming weeks, I hope, that in the Bible, God speaks to us and gives us clear, simple answers to these kind of questions that are enormously helpful and far-reaching.

Now, as we set out on this series, I'm also aware that these kind of questions are not just ones that are topical. They're also deeply personal.

And we may find that we find some of this painful. And I'm very sensitive to that, and I hope that's something that you'll feel able to talk to people in your small group fellowship about and talk to staff members about and talk to me about and talk about what you think we should be covering as we look at this in the coming weeks.

[6 : 17] But it's much better to get these issues out in the open rather than to think, oh, it's too sensitive. We can't answer these questions. So let's dive in.

Who am I? That's what we're looking at this morning. We might start to answer that question in different ways. And one way is to look from without, out with ourselves.

In traditional cultures, and often in Eastern cultures today, which some of us here have come from, we'll often look outside of ourselves at our social environment to answer the question, who am I?

I am defined by the relationships around me. When I meet someone, they may ask me, where are you from? And what village are you from? And what family are you from? Because it helps them place who they think that we are.

And what I do in life is shaped by the expectations of other people. And there are big advantages to that kind of culture. It gives someone a place where they belong.

[7 : 20] It gives them security. It gives the wider society a strong sense of community. At the same time, there are disadvantages to that way of living. The individual and their uniqueness and their freedom to make choices can be squashed by that kind of environment.

Last week, we had Yvonne with us, one of our mission partners. She serves Jesus in Ghana. And she was saying, in the village where she lives, when someone gets married, what the family do is they just build an extra room on the family home.

And the expectation is that the wife, the new bride, will come and live with the wider family and serve the most senior members of the family. And what that means Christianly is that if that family worship ancestors or they worship idols, the strong expectation on this new couple, even if they've chosen to be Christian, is that they will join in with that kind of idolatry.

So that kind of way of life can limit somebody's choices. Their talents and gifts can be overlooked because of expectation of what they'll do based on what their dad did or what their mum did.

And in the UK, those of us raised in the UK will often say we don't like that kind of idea. So where do we look for to work out who we are?

[8 : 37] Well, we look on the inside. We look from within to find our identity. What we're told is there is a real you deep inside you and the greatest good you could aspire to is to live it out.

We get that with the big phrases of our times. You do you. You be you. Be true to yourself. Now there's a jargon term for this kind of thinking and it is expressive individualism.

Don't worry if you've never thought of yourself as an expressive individualist. You probably already are one. Okay? If you live in Scotland today, you might not be but most of us are because all it means is that basically we've been brought up to think I'm unique, I'm special and I find who I am by looking inside me and when I discover it, I have the right to express it and I mustn't let anyone else get in the way.

So, if you've never thought of yourself as an expressive individualist, you just have to think have I ever kind of bought into the idea of be true to yourself or you do you?

These are the kind of slogans for our times. It's the air that we breathe. We get it in our songs from Lady Gaga to Robbie Williams. This is what people sing about. We see it in our schools.

[9 : 55] So, here's a poster that was on the school, on the wall of a school that one of my kids is at. I know you can't read it. I'm going to read it out. Don't worry. This was on the wall. There is a voice inside of you that whispers all day long, I feel that this is right for me.

I know that this is wrong. No teacher, preacher, parent, friend, or wise man can decide what's right for you. Just listen to the voice that speaks inside. Lots of you here won't even notice this because you are saturated in it.

It's just how you've grown up. And even if you didn't get this at school, the place almost all of us have been exposed to this, the real experts at this, is Disney.

Right? Disney. We get it in Frozen. I'm assuming this morning that you know the story of Frozen. If you don't, good for you. Okay? But lots of us, you know, some of you grew up going to Frozen parties.

Others of us have taken our kids to Frozen parties. Elsa's parents, they meant well, but they were suppressing who she really was on the inside.

[11 : 03] And she has to break out. And she does break out. Listen to what she sings. The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside. Couldn't keep it in. Heaven knows I tried.

Don't let them in. Don't let them see. Be the good girl you always have to be. Conceal. Don't feel. Don't let them know. Well, now they know. It's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through.

No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. Let it go. Let it go. Can't hold it back anymore. That's Frozen. Yeah?

You thought you were just going to a party with other princesses. You were being indoctrinated into expressive individualism. Okay, we see the same theme in Moana. Moana, she's born a princess on a Pacific island with expectations, responsibilities, and her parents urge her.

If she just fits in, she'll be happy. The island is all she needs, they say. But we know the truth. That's constraining. Her salvation story is she's got to break free.

[12 : 11] And she sings, the voice inside me sings a different song. What is wrong with me? And the movie's answer is, there's nothing wrong with you, Moana. Break free. Look to the horizon.

Who knows how far you'll go? But let me just mention one more Disney movie here that unlocks for us the big problem with this whole thing.

And it's The Incredibles. The Incredibles. where one of the characters, Buddy Pine, right, who actually becomes the supervillain, okay, syndrome, becomes a megalomaniac.

But he says this, he says this, you always say be true to yourself, but you never say which part of yourself to be true to. There's the dilemma.

What if the voice inside you says something that the people around you think is morally abhorrent? who gets to decide which voice inside I listen to?

[13 : 10] You always say be true to yourself. You never say which part of yourself to be true to. And if we're not into Disney, there's a great novel that sums this up, The Goldfinch, very widely read, award-winning novel.

In the last chapter, the main character exposes this whole flaw with Western thinking. Let me read what the character says in the last chapter. From William Blake to Lady Gaga, it's a curiously uniform message accepted from high to low.

When in doubt, what to do? How do we know what's right for us? Every shrink, every career counselor, every Disney princess knows the answer. Be yourself.

Follow your heart. Only here's what I really, really want someone to explain to me. What if one happens to be possessed of a heart that can't be trusted? What if the heart, for its own unfathomable reasons, leads one willfully away from health, civic responsibility, and all the blandly held common virtues, and instead straight towards a beautiful flair of ruin and disaster?

There's the problem right there with placing the responsibility to work out who I am on me and what I feel inside. What if my inner self is deeply selfish?

[14 : 28] The Bible says that it is that we will get to a point when we listen to the voice inside us where we realize this is really self-centered. So what does God say?

What does God say about all of this? Some of you have been thinking that for ten minutes now. What does God say, Martin? And we're going to get there about who we are as humans. Genesis chapter one. Let's turn back to that together.

page three of the church Bibles where we see in Genesis chapter one. If you just look down that first page, Genesis chapter one, there's this carefully constructed account of God's creation.

And there's this rhythm to it. Three days of him forming. And then three days of him filling what he formed. And by day six, the land is being filled with animals, with living creatures, and humanity is made that day.

In other words, like every being that's living except God, we are made. We are creatures. But what God then says about humanity stands apart from everything else that he makes.

[15 : 38] If you have a look with me at verse 26, 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 gives human beings a different badge to wear that they are the image bearers of God.

And that title seems to be parallel in what we just read there with likeness of God. Did you see that? So, he says, let's make man in our image, in our likeness.

God is plural here, let us, three persons, one God, and makes us to relate. We are uniquely able to relate to each other and to God.

And we're made to rule. God is the one calling the shots through Genesis 1. He's the one with authority. He's the king because He made everything. And He gives humanity the privilege of being His vice regents so that they may rule over the rest of creation.

[16 : 55] We get the same, we get the pattern repeated in verse 27. God created mankind in His own image. There's the image language. And then responsibility to rule.

Verse 28, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and every living creature. Every other creature, when we look back through Genesis 1, we keep reading that they're made according to their kinds.

And we saw that yesterday. We were in the botanic gardens and we went in one of those huge greenhouses in the botanic gardens and we were just overwhelmed afresh by how God has made the plant life each according to its kinds.

And there's this wonderful, creative variety in what God has made. Each according to their kinds. But when we get to humanity, rather than them being an animal and a kind of animal, we get this different description.

Let's make them in our image. And we're just going to think about the implications of that with the rest of our time today. First, it's an honoring word.

[18 : 01] It gives us dignity without deity. God is the king and when He says to you and me, you are my image bearers, He's saying, you are royalty. Who does that apply to?

There is no human being you will ever meet who is not made in the image of God. Think about the people that you might meet. They might be a Scottish nationalist. They might be a unionist.

They might be a Tory made in the image of God. They might be gender confused. They might be same-sex attracted. They might be in prison for starting riots about immigration.

They might be an asylum seeker. They could be an investment banker. They could be a heroin addict living in a drug den. Every living human being has this image from the moment life begins and nobody ever loses this image.

You can't lose it. Royalty. It gives you dignity and it gives everyone you meet dignity. It doesn't give us deity. Genesis 1 is saying to us you're not God so stop thinking that you are.

[19 : 05] And some of us might need to hear that. There are ways that people around us as humans can have an over-inflated view of humanity as though we think we are at the center of the universe and everything should be about us.

So when we read the Bible we are offended by learning that it's about God. But the Bible gives us the truth that the universe isn't all about us. God made everything for his glory.

It's all about him. But I think more often our problem today is that we have far too low a view of ourselves. You are God's image bearers.

We're not just another form of ape. You know when you're watching a wildlife program we're not just mammals like the things that we're watching. I remember watching Planet Earth with mates when we were students and a couple of the guys saying we're just like those aren't we?

They're so human-like. But when you're watching a wildlife program like that Planet Earth 2 or Planet Earth we're not to look at it and think we're just like those we're to think we are like the maker of those.

[20 : 14] We're different. They don't watch wildlife programs about us. It's true. We need to think more of God so that we think more of ourselves.

And that's what David does in Psalm 8 that we had read for us. In Psalm 8 David starts by looking at the cosmos and he is overwhelmed by the grandeur of God.

He says O Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens. He's overwhelmed by the grandeur of the universe and gasping at the glory of the one who made it.

And then verse 3 he says when I consider your heavens the work of your fingers the moon and the stars which you have set in place what is mankind that you are mindful of them?

Human beings that you care for them. King David here nails down the problem that when you take away the God of Genesis chapter 1 and you look at the scale of our universe what are we?

[21 : 20] It was in the news last week that the largest galaxies in our universe they've discovered astronomers that they are they're gathered in massive clusters of galaxies that you could describe as cities of galaxies and here we are in one solar system of one galaxy the Milky Way that is unthinkable big for us.

So when you take away the God of Genesis 1 and try and go out and answer the question what is humanity? Surely the answer is nothing.

we are breathtakingly insignificant. I've got a friend who got this as a young adult and in genuine depression said to me my big issue is my big fear is that we the human race are nothing greater than ants scurrying across a warm rock.

But then in the psalm David remembers Genesis chapter 1 and so in verse 5 he answers the question what is mankind with this answer to God you have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

In other words God has given us a royal status that is innate to us being human and we undervalue this whenever we think to ourselves I'm okay I'm valuable I'm significant I've got worth because of something that I do if you think to yourself I'm not too bad I'm holding down a job I'm getting a degree I've got a flat I've got a car I've got some money in the bank I've got a few friends my appraisal at work was good if anything like that slips into our minds and is connected to us with our self worth we are undervaluing ourselves for God says you have innate royalty do you feel that?

[23 : 16] hopefully it makes you walk a bit taller out of here this morning hopefully even when you came in today for coffee and you saw people from the 930 they were just they were just a bit they lifted a bit and you thought what's happened at the 930 service?

we were looking at this Genesis 1 made in the image of God we had a pastor here last year from Nashville Ray Ortland he preached for us and he did a men's meeting for us in the hall and at one point he was teaching on this topic and he got me up in front of all the men in front of like 70 or 80 men there and he said look at this guy isn't he special?

don't we just love him? he's royal it was excruciating to be that guy okay but his point was it could have been any of us there it could have been any of the men there and it could have been any woman any child because he was saying this is what God says about you you are royalty and in some way this should make sense to us because it is a truth that resonates with us that's our next implication we're going to think about that this is a compelling word it makes sense of who we think we are something is happening in Britain at the moment and we're seeing it a bit in Glasgow as well as well as across the rest of Britain that there are people led in part by popular writers and speakers starting to come to church starting to have a new interest in the Christian faith because they're realizing it's only the Bible that makes sense of the values that we hold most dear to us we know there's something precious something valuable about human beings something worth fighting for if you think about the furious rage with which people demonstrated when George Floyd was murdered by police in the US a few years ago we have this deep strong visceral sense humanity matters it matters how we treat human beings but we have no grounding for those views without God

David again in Psalm 8 saying without God what is man what is mankind so you might go to a political meeting in our times and we and we're debating do we send soldiers soldiers to a country where we've seen that there's kind of tyrannical rule or there's ethnic cleansing and we want to break in and stop it because we say they're treating people like animals but then you turn on a science documentary and what does it tell us we're just animals so why do we know this is wrong in the secular West today we're a bit like you know if you're watching a cartoon and there's a character running and then they run off the edge of a cliff and what usually happens is they they pause and then they look down and they realize there's nothing underneath them and then they plummet to the floor that's our society at the moment with deeply held views of universal human rights that we say are self-evident that every human being has these rights and we'll fight for them but without

Genesis chapter one that we're made in the image of God there's no grounding for them a recent example of someone saying this was Ayaan Hirsi Ali she was raised in radical Islam she fled from it and from an arranged marriage and then she was living in the west and after 9-11 she became one of the new atheists this kind of movement that's kind of lost its steam now but this movement of people like Richard Dawkins who were ferociously speaking about how they said there's no God and she said religion is madness and she wrote about it with a very clear mind and then she wrote an article last year explaining that she has become a Christian and explaining why and since then she's explained that over time she has gone through what she describes as a genuine spiritual awakening with Jesus but the first step she took on that journey into church to learn more were when she realized that the secular values that she cared about so deeply atheism had no way to defend it was morally bankrupt to defend what she wanted to live for and die for because those values come from a Christian view of the world that were made in God's image so it's a compelling word and if you're someone who's here today and you're still looking in at the Christian faith then coming to the life course on Wednesday would be a way to think more about that like Ayaan has done next we're going to think about how it's a reshaping word it changes how we treat ourselves and everyone else being made in the image of God should define you and how you see yourself it means that it doesn't matter if you're someone who feels nobody thinks very much of me at all

[28 : 18] God is the one whose verdict matters and he says you are royal and the image of God should define how we view everyone else and how you treat them this summer we went to London and took the family to the Tower of London where you can see the crown jewels and we queued for ages in one of those zigzag queues to get through to see the crown jewels but every single person in that zigzagging queue is more valuable more beautiful and more regal than the crowns that we went to see inside the waitress who serves you in a coffee shop the road sweeper you pass by on the way to work the bus driver getting shouted at because they're running late the women who are trafficked to be enslaved and used by the porn industry the men who traffic them and enslave them everybody is true is made in the image of God and it's true of them whatever their mental ability and capacity the old man with dementia is more valuable than the Mona Lisa in God's eyes and we are to treat them in that kind of way folks our time is gone for today but for two minutes let's just think about how the story of humanity doesn't end with Genesis 2 our next point is that this is a word rejected each one of us in our hearts rejected God as God and when we reject him we reject this identity of being made in his image because we don't want to be answerable to him in Romans chapter one it puts it like this it says although we knew

God we neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him and our foolish hearts were darkened and then it sums up the human project of rebelling against God in Genesis chapter three by saying for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God we never fully lose the glory of being image bearers of God but the way that we have marred God's image in us deserves shame and not honour but there is a route back and the means to us coming back is Jesus the eternal son who took on our human nature the truly royal son of God left the throne room of heaven and that's our final point very briefly a word restored Jesus renews our royalty he has come and fully lived out God's purposes for us of being his image bearers in Colossians we read that he is the image of the invisible God and through him God offers to everyone the gift of reconciliation with God through the peace that Jesus made by his blood shed on the cross

Jesus believes we are so valuable we were worth fighting for and he came into our world the magnificent king of the ages to endure the shame of the cross so that he could share with us his honor for love's sake he was stripped of his dignity at the cross he was humiliated he was treated like an animal nothing more than bones and flesh and then God raised him and crowned him with glory and honor and says to all of heaven and earth today look at him look at my son my forever king and he invites us today come to Jesus let him take your shame because he endured shame on the cross and let him share with you his royalty so it means if you're a Christian here you are royal twice you have a double dignity that you were made in the image of God a vice regent for God in his world and then when you turn from that image he now remakes you and is restoring you through Jesus 2 Corinthians 5:17 says this if anyone is in

Christ he is a new creation the old is gone the new has come so we're going to respond to God's word together in a couple of ways we're going to pray together now I'm going to lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing in response to God's word let's pray heavenly father we thank you so much that you have liberated us from the burden of working out who we are for ourselves that you tell us who we are you give us dignity that you made us in your image and that you offer in Christ to redeem and restore that image in us may we go out into the world with deeper confidence and security in being your creatures and your children through your son and may we be marked by our respect for everyone that we meet treating them as royalty because of who you made them to be we ask these things in Jesus name Amen