

Introducing Humanity

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, James. And if you've got a Bible with you, it'd be worth keeping it open in front of you at that passage, those verses in the second half of Genesis chapter one.

Okay, last week we began at the very beginning. We looked at Genesis chapter one, verses one, three to 25. We saw the Bible's creation account, or at least the beginning of that.

If you missed that, it'd be worth maybe trying to catch up with that. You can find that on the website, Introducing the Creator. It's called because we were seeing how the creation points to the one who made it.

We saw how the Bible opens up, the Bible begins introducing us to the God who is at its very heart. Well, this week as we finish off Genesis chapter one, our focus shifts.

And in our verses this morning, we are introduced to humanity. Having seen God through his work in creation, we now see humanity and our place in his creation.

[1 : 03] And this is just an incredible passage, which gets to, I think, some of those huge questions that people have been asking throughout history. Who are we? What are we here for?

How are we supposed to treat others? Why? All of these things we're going to see tied up in what we're taught in these amazing verses. And again, as we get to grips with them, I really hope, I really pray that we will see, as we did last week, not only the truth of what the Bible teaches, but also why it is such good news.

Why the Bible's description of humanity, of who we are, of how we got here, of the trajectory the Bible sets us off on, why that is good, why that is one that leads to joy, to flourishing, to the world that we desire.

Because again, as we saw last week, it is set up by a God who is good. And so let's just dive straight in to the first kind of foundational truth that we see here in what the Bible teaches about humanity, and that is the dignity of humanity.

And we're going to see here that actually the Bible gives us the grounds to say that human life is precious, human life is special, human life is valuable, the dignity of humanity.

[2 : 23] Verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Verse 27, so God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them. Now let me say something bold, which is this, that there are no more important words on how we think of ourselves.

There are no more important words on how we're to treat one another. There are no more important words on humanity itself than those words that we have just read in verse 26 and 27 of Genesis chapter 1.

Not that this is the full story of humanity. Remember here in Genesis 1 and 2, we're before sin enters the world in Genesis 3, what we call the fall, where things start to go wrong.

We'll see that in a couple of weeks. But really what that means is that in these chapters, we are seeing the perfect picture of what God intended.

- [3 : 30] This is like looking at humanity in a glass cabinet in the showroom. This is what it's supposed to be like before it gets taken home and battered about and bruised a little bit.
- This is God's perfect design for humanity. And so much of what we think is good and actually so much that we or that our world takes for granted about what is good and about how we should treat one another can be traced back to these words at its foundation.
- And so what does it say? Why is this so significant? Well, these words teach us the dignity of humanity because we are all, each and every one, made in the image of God.
- If we grasp that, that is something that will transform our lives, will transform our approach to life. And also as we grasp that, we'll see that that is an incredibly different and that is an incredibly more dignified view of humanity than any other approach or any other view of the world can give us.
- Now we mentioned briefly last week how these opening chapters of Genesis were written in part to kind of push back against and to encourage God's people in light of the alternative creation stories of the people around them.
- [4 : 53] These passages were written to show the joy of being God's people, the God of the Bible's people, how that is good. Just to give one example, one of the most kind of prevalent creation myths that would have been surrounding the people who first read Genesis was that of the God Marduk.
- In this myth, the universe is created from the corpse of one of Marduk's enemies who he defeats in battle. And then the account goes on to say really that humanity is created as a bit of an afterthought to save the gods from having to carry out these menial tasks.
- He creates this universe and then he thinks, oh, it's kind of hard work looking after a universe. Let's make some little minions and they can do all the things that we don't really want to do. Humanity is cheap.
- Humanity is utilitarian. Humanity is insignificant. Can you see straight away how different the Bible's account is? Where actually humanity is created as the pinnacle of creation.
- There is something incredibly special about God's creation of mankind. Throughout the chapter, you'll be able to see it if you've got it in front of there, you have repeated and God said, and God said, and God said.
- [6 : 10] And then we get to verse 26. Then God said. This is the climax of the chapter and there's almost a kind of a pause, an intake of breath before God first announces what he's about to create.
- It's only humanity that is created in that way. It's only, in all creation, it's only humanity that God creates in his image, in his likeness. We'll see later on, it's only humanity in all of creation that is given dominion.
- Genesis is telling its readers, it is telling us, unlike what the nations around you might think, you are not an afterthought to God. You are not incidental to the kind of the real business of the universe, but actually you have a real God-given dignity.
- A dignity that you didn't earn and a dignity that nothing and nobody could ever take away. And so straight away, we're reminded again that that is good news.
- And if nothing else, if you don't hear anything else this morning, remember that one thing, God has given you genuine dignity and you are precious to him.
- [7 : 27] That is at the heart of this account of humanity that we see in Genesis chapter 1 that pushed back against the other accounts of the nations around the people. And actually, what pushed back against those ancient creation myths continues to push back against more modern creation accounts.

consider the completely kind of naturalistic account of how we got here. That means an account that has no place for God. That means an account that says we are here entirely by chance the product of random events at a molecular or sub-molecular level.

And eventually, this is where we've ended up. And there's no external guidance. There's no hand on any of that process. Really, that is the dominant view, certainly in the West.

And that is the kind of the air that we breathe, the world that we live in. And really, the irony of that is that we also live in a time, perhaps more than ever, which is concerned about justice.

We live in a time which speaks so much about care for the oppressed. We live in an era where human rights are rightly so important. And yet, without this biblical foundation, really, there's no reason to believe why that should be the case.

[8 : 43] You know, if we got here purely by survival of the fittest, there's no reason that that should change now. It's only through the Bible, it's only through this account in Genesis that we can actually say that human rights matter because humans have dignity, because we are created in the image of God.

There has to be that foundation. Again, we see the Bible's account of creation is good news. the Bible's teaching on where we came from is good news.

And it's actually news that is so assumed, it's actually a view that is so foundation in our culture that it's largely been forgotten. It's had so much built on top of this biblical foundation that the foundation itself is almost completely covered from view and has been forgotten.

But if that gets taken away, then nothing else of how we think about other people, of how we value other people, of what we should do about that, nothing else makes sense.

The historian Tom Holland himself is not a Christian, but he's written about how we see our world through this Christian lens of the inherent dignity of humanity, how that wasn't always the case.

[9 : 56] If you lived in the ancient Roman world or the ancient Greek world, that was not the case. But because of our Christian roots, we have started to build on that foundation. The good news is that it's not just what we want to be true.

The good news is that is what is true. That is what the Bible teaches us. That the dignity of humanity. Good news, but also a challenge to us as well because it's easy to speak about society as if it's something out there that we're not part of.

If only society would remember this and act in line with it. But actually, it's a great challenge for us to think this morning, well, how do we view people? When you walk down the street, when you see someone drunk at 11am in the morning, what are your first thoughts of that person?

Or perhaps the people you know who seem to lurch from one crisis to the next, many of them perhaps through their own bad decisions as well as contributing factors. What is our attitude toward those people?

Because God says that they are people made in his image. God says they have dignity. And really, this passage comes home to roost with not just wouldn't it be great if the world would recognize this?

[11 : 10] Isn't this good news? Absolutely it is. But this morning, are those of us who do accept this, are we living that out in the way that we see others?

Inside the church, outside the church, that the dignity of humanity which leads us to patience, which leads us to care for the least as well as the greatest, for those who people forget, as well as those who people celebrate.

And so we see straight away in this passage, and it is good news, but it challenges us as well, the dignity of humanity created in the image of God. And we could talk a morning about the kind of importance and the implications of that.

Do keep on thinking about that, chatting about that after the service. But let's move on now and see the second thing which is shown to us here in these verses, which we'll call the design of humanity.

We've seen that this is an incredible passage for elevating humanity, giving humanity this significance. Humanity has a unique and a special place in God's good creation.

[12 : 23] And yet these verses also help us right from the start to ensure that we don't get above our station as humans. They keep us humble in light of who God is because they remind us that we are designed, we are created by God.

Again, verse 27, so God created man in his own image. We saw last week that there is this fundamental distinction between the creator and his creation.

And that even as the climax of all that God has made, the unique dignity of being made in his image, as humans, we still remain in this creation column with God alone as creator.

We're made in God's image, but we are not God's equals. And there's no such thing as a self-made man. Each and every one of us are made by God, and yet that is something that humanity is constantly trying to push back against.

We're going to see this more fully in a couple of weeks. Genesis 3, as sin enters the world, the temptation there that is on offer, the temptation that is fallen for, is this, that you will be like God.

[13 : 38] You will be like God. That is the constant temptation that we are drawn towards. We want to kind of pole vault over that creation-creator divide to be in God's place and push back against God's design.

And yet actually, true joy, as we're trying to make the point in these chapters, true satisfaction, the best way to live is only through embracing how God has made us and how God has made his universe.

Going with the grain of what God calls here in verse 31, very good. God has made us and his design for humanity is part of that.

And so it's great for us in the kind of unspoiled world of Genesis 1 and 2 to see what that design is. And one particular aspect, which is a huge topic in our world today, which is laid out for us here in our passage, is male and female.

Verse 28, again, in the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. From the beginning, we see the male and femaleness of humanity, the sex-based distinction of men and women is part of God's good design.

[14 : 54] It's part of what God calls very good. What do we want to say about that? Well, I suppose, firstly, to highlight that for the first time in history, with the rise of the transgender school of thought or movement, whatever you'd like to call that, is that in speaking about the male-female distinction, we are treading on contested ground.

And it's important to say here, right from the offset, ground where there is a lot of confusion, ground where there is a lot of hurt, ground where we need to tread carefully. But we live in a time when our world actively desires to blur the lines or really remove entirely that male-female distinction that God lays out for us right in the beginning in his design of humanity.

Where rather than that being something given by God, people want it to be something that they can define and decide for themselves. That's a new expression of it in our era, but actually it's ultimately the same, that age-old problem of people pushing against that creator-creation distinction.

We want to be like God. We don't want to be designed. We want to be the designers. And so how should the church respond to this particular issue of the confusion, the anguish around us regarding sex and gender?

We don't want to be a church that just kind of jumps straight in at every hot-button issue. But it's so clearly presented to us here in this passage, isn't it? Well, first we have to remember that all people have that dignity we've been talking about as they are made in the image of God.

[16 : 38] Even those who would deny that, even those who we might profoundly disagree with, but the dignity of all humans dictates we speak about people and we speak to people carefully, respectfully, graciously.

We speak in a way that we would if those people were present in the room with us. And there might well be people in this room this morning who are wrestling with things in this area.

And if that is true, we are really glad that you are here with us. And we genuinely mean that and we would love to hear more of your story and we'd love you to stick with us.

But as we speak respectfully, we also need to hold fast to the design of humanity, of what God tells us in his word. Male and female, he created them.

not because we're trying to control people, but because we want what is good for people. Again, last week, we talked about God, the creator God of abundant goodness, a God who cares, a God who wants the best for us.

[17 : 45] And what he has called very good in his unspoiled creation is this male-female distinction. And so as his people, we want to hold that out as a very good thing.

That actually the pain so many people feel in this area is not solved by going kind of further down the rabbit hole and the various interventions that often involves and seeking to undo male and femaleness.

But actually, it's to be invited to live in line with that design. To live in line with that pattern to which we were created by a loving creator.

Now, sin, as we said, has entered the world. Sin affects all this. But we see here in Genesis 1 the goodness of male and female. That doesn't mean girls having to wear pink and play with dresses.

One of my daughters is very relieved about that. It doesn't mean boys having to be kind of bodybuilders and super macho. I'm very relieved about that. You know, we don't want to kind of impose our stereotypes on people.

[18 : 50] But at the same time, we do want to recognize that distinction and that difference that there is male and female and we celebrate that because that's God's design of humanity.

And we can do that because both male and female are made in the image of God. And actually, this would have been kind of the challenge for the first readers of Genesis.

This would have been the radically countercultural foundation that God's people were to live out. not the distinction between male and female. They were very happy about that. But the dignity of both male and female.

The Bible is abundantly clear that women are in no way below men. That there is distinction, there is difference. But here in black and white, both made in the image of God, both equally sharing that dignity.

Again, for us as a church, we have this great call to model difference with dignity. For example, we think that the Bible teaches different roles for male and female within the church.

[19 : 53] We believe that male and female aren't simply kind of interchangeable. I'm always willing to kind of chat more about that with people if they'd like. But overall, all of that is that conviction that actually in God's design for humanity, there is dignity for all equally.

For male and female, both equally dignified, both equally vital in the church. And that it is good to embrace and live out and celebrate how God made us and what God calls very good.

The design of humanity. Okay, I know there's a lot there in a fairly short section. I thought I was being generous, giving myself two weeks for Genesis chapter 1. That was slightly naive.

But if there's anything that goes on in this passage, anything that we talk about, and this goes for any other weeks as well, but that you'd like to talk more about, please do find me afterwards. Please do get in touch. Please don't go away feeling confused or unsatisfied.

It's great to talk about these things more because they can be complex. But let's move on now to the final emphasis in this passage. And this is something which runs, again, right through these verses.

[21 : 02] Again, something foundational that God puts at the front and center of the very creation of mankind. And that is the dominion of humanity.

The dominion of humanity. And we hear that repeated again and again. Verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth.

It's repeated in verse 28 where God gives humanity what's often called the creation mandate. the role that mankind has been created to play in his creation.

And God says this, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And the incredible thing about humanity and at least part of what it means to be made in the image of God and the dignity of that is that humanity is designed to have authority.

[22 : 12] That we are part of creation but we are to have authority over, to rule over, to subdue, to fill the earth. We are part of creation and yet we have a dominion over that creation.

It's not an absolute authority, only God holds that but it is a delegated authority that God has given to those who are made in his image.

The picture is of the king who gives his most trusted subjects rule over an area not to do whatever they want with it but to do the king's will in that place. We are given this dominion, the dominion of humanity by the one who holds absolute dominion.

And now there is a whole load again we could say here about the outworking of this. I think it immediately flags up that idea doesn't it of kind of creation care that actually Christians should look after the world that God has created.

We are called to do that but not as much of the current kind of environmental movement would suggest as if we are parasites, as if the world would just be better off if we weren't here.

[23 : 24] But actually we take on that role as good rulers reflecting God in that taking care of what God has given us responsibility over. Again we could talk a lot about that and that's something the world thinks a lot about but actually I think really the focus in this passage the emphasis here is bigger than that because at the heart of this dominion is also the idea of expansion.

Let's look at some of those words there be fruitful, multiply, fill, subdue, have dominion. It's like if you ever played the board game Risk. I don't play because I get far too grumpy with things like that but you know I've seen it before I've seen other people do it.

You know you start off I think with your few pieces kind of clustered in one area maybe you're the yellows and then your goal is to spread and to cover the whole board so the whole earth is covered in your yellow representatives.

It's that idea of spreading to fill the earth only God is not setting us off as risk would be for conflict to fill to subdue here is not an aggressive thing it is that God's good rule would be seen as those created in his image represent him well in every corner of his creation.

God's plan for humanity made in his image is as we carry out our God given role over creation that we should point to the glory of the creator.

[24 : 59] The dominion of humanity is for the glory of God. Now again as we finish this week looking at Genesis chapter 1 and 2 this perfect world and then as we look out the window as we look at the world around us it can seem a bit like looking at the picture in a recipe book of some incredible Michelin star dish and then looking at what you've made and the two don't quite match up you know something has gone wrong somewhere the present reality doesn't quite match up to the picture and again we want to be really up front and we want to see that that is true of our world that something has gone wrong somewhere the present reality doesn't match up to the Genesis 1 and 2 picture we don't see humanity exercising this dominion over the world in a godly way and instead we see people so frequently misusing the influence the dominion that God has given us whether that is over creation or whether that is over other people in families or government or even perhaps most tragically of all in churches we don't see humanity as a whole living as God's image in a way that points toward him as the creator we see as we saw earlier humanity pushing against that creator creation distinction because something has gone wrong and that something is as we've said that sin has come into the world that has disrupted our relationship with God our creator rather than reflecting him well each one of us is now like a broken mirror reflecting a distorted picture rather than the true God humanity was given this incredible privileged position and yet we have fallen short of that task given to us and yet wonderfully that is not the end of the story

Genesis 1 and 2 is not the end of the story Genesis 3 is not the end of the story the story continues because incredibly Jesus came to us into the New Testament after the life and death and resurrection of Jesus the apostle Paul says of Jesus he is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation and you recognize there how Paul picks up that image language of Genesis 1 and says that it is in Jesus that that is perfected he is the perfect human who perfectly points to the perfect creator God he is the one who perfectly exercises dominion by living and ruling with perfect righteousness we read in this passage this elevated role this great dignity given to humanity but we have fallen short of what we were designed for and yet the great news of the gospel is that Jesus has come to bring restoration humanity turns away from God but Jesus comes to bring forgiveness so that we can know God and have a relationship with him humanity doesn't represent

God as we should but Jesus shows God to the world the image of the invisible God and incredibly through Jesus that means we can carry out that role of showing people the glory of the creator not by pointing to ourselves not because we represent him as we should but by pointing to Jesus through him the ultimate human we can know God we have that privilege of what we were designed to do in his image of sharing God with the world around us as we live in light of the perfect rule of Jesus ultimately how do we know the dignity the value that God gives to mankind we read it here on the pages of scripture but we know it all the more because he sent his own son to rescue and redeem us that God didn't write us off and say well they failed let's get rid of them but instead he came at the greatest possible cost to rescue us we want the world to know the glory of the creator and the value of humanity the pinnacle of his creation that that is good news and that is the greatest way to live and so we want to point the world we want to point one another we want to point ourselves back time and time again to his son

Jesus Christ who suffered for us so that we could embrace the dignity the design and the dominion God gives us as those made in his image and for his glory let's pray together as weís as we