

In God's Image

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome to this new series of Lunchtime Bible Talks. We're going to be doing a topical series. More often than not, we take a chapter or a book and work through it.

But from time to time, we take a biblical topic. And the topic we're going to take over the next few weeks is, what does the Bible say about being human?

What does it mean to be a human being? We're going to spend most of our time in the early chapters of the Bible, an awful lot more in these than we can possibly see.

And then a little foray into the Psalms and into the letter to the Hebrews. That's what we'll be doing over the next few weeks. So would you turn, please, to Genesis 1.

Unsurprisingly, that's on page 1. The easiest part of the Bible to find, apart from the last chapter of Revelation. We're going to read the first five verses and then jump on to verse 26.

[1 : 08] So let's hear the word of God. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and the void and darkness was over the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering, or swooping would be a better word, over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light.

And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day. And the darkness he called night. There was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And so the sequence goes through the various days of creation. And down now to 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 and over all the earth. And over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[2 : 12] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, 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 God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed. This is on the face of all the earth. And every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth. And to every bird of the heavens.

And to everything that creeps on the earth. Everything that has the breath of life. I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made. And behold, it was very good. And there was evening. And there was morning. The sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished.

[3 : 13] And all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day.

And made it holy. Because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Amen.

That is the word of the Lord. Let's have a moment of prayer now.

Lord God, we thank you. You have not left us in ignorance of why you created us as humans. You have shown us the very opening of your revelation.

That you created us in your image. And as the story continues, we thank you have shown us how that image can be restored in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so help us.

We look at these verses. In many ways, very familiar. But in other ways, endless depths in them. Which we will never fathom. And so help us to live more effectively.

[4 : 16] And to be better witnesses for you when we leave here. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what are humans?

Now, apparently, I'm no scientist. If you are a scientist and I've got this wrong, don't bother telling me because I'll forget anyway. Apparently, there is enough fat in us to make seven bars of soap. There is enough iron for one medium-sized nail. There is sugar enough for seven cups of tea. There is lime to whitewash a rabbit hutch.

Phosphorus to tip 2,200 matches. Magnesium for two pinches of salt. Potash, which can explode a small creature.

And sulfur to get rid of fleas. Now, in one sense, that is what humans are. If you're simply talking about the physical frame.

[5 : 18] A very materialistic view of humanity. Now, some have had a very, very, very derogatory view. The philosopher Nietzsche said, the earth has a skin.

And that skin has diseases. One of its diseases is called humanity. A very gloomy view. On the other hand, Hamlet said, Forgive me for quoting Shakespeare.

I'm going to do it whether you forgive me or not. What a piece of work is a man. How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty, in form and moving. How like a god.

The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. Now, the truth of the matter, of course, is that between these two views on the spectrum, there is truth.

Humanity, I mean, when you think of the horrific things that happen, when you think of the Islamic State, when you think of drug pushers, when you think of violence, when you think of pornography and child abuse and so on, there's a great deal to be said for Nietzsche's view that humanity is a disease.

[6 : 26] But on the other hand, when you think of the good that people do, when you think of people spending their lives in the slums, spending their lives in dangerous places, trying to help, then the view that Hamlet puts forward has truth in it as well.

So, what is it to be human? The Bible tells us, very simply, it is to be in the image of God. That's our subject for the next few moments.

We are in his image. Look at verse 26. Then God said, that's chapter 26 of chapter 26, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

God has placed his picture, his image in humanity, and God wants it back. God wants to see his image in the people that he has made.

In one sense, God has placed his image on everything that he's made. I mean, after all, butterflies reflect the beauty and delicacy of the divine mind. Galaxies and stellar universes reflect his vastness, and so on.

[7 : 37] Beauty of the hills, of the forests, of the woods, and of the sea reflect his splendor. But only in humanity is his image. Very interesting.

The word create here, I'll come to that in a moment, it's only ever used of God. And up to now, it's been used sparingly. But here, three times in one verse, created, created, created.

If God is holy, holy, holy, humanity is created, created, created. And that's the first and most important thing about us that the Bible says.

We didn't make ourselves. We weren't produced from test tubes. We weren't, and even, even so-called test tube babies, they're not really produced.

You still need the raw material. You see, when God creates, God creates, something is called creating out of nothing. Think about it for a moment.

[8 : 38] Only God can create. We can be creative. Can you think, for example, of a new primary color? I don't mean a, I don't mean a new color. I thought you should have had on paint boxes when I was a boy.

I used to love the names on these paint boxes, Burnt, Sienna, and it's the only one I can remember, and names like that. Can you think of a creature that's not just bits of other creatures stuck together?

And so on. You see, to be creative is to use the materials God has already given us. But we can't create out of nothing. Beethoven wrote wonderful music.

He did not create sound. Shakespeare wrote wonderful plays. He did not create language. That is the point. There has to be the raw material. And to us as humans, God has given the capacity to be creative, but not to create.

Only God, by his spirit, can create life, whether it's physical life or spiritual life. As we'll see, the image in two weeks' time, the image still survives the fall, like a great ruined building.

[9 : 54] When I was at Rome a few years ago, I remember being most impressed by the ruins of the Colosseum. And many of you can remember other ruined buildings which still show something of the splendor of the original.

So the way to be truly human is not to step outside of God-given boundaries. Rather, it's to become what God made us to be, what God created us to be.

And as we'll see in the last talk, this will be fully restored in Christ. The Apostle John says, when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Humans are created. They are given the capacity to be creative, given the capacity to love, given the capacity to do all kinds of wonderful things, but we are not the creator.

That is why it's so wrong to worship anything or anyone other than the creator. It's silly. After all, if we worship something that our hands have made, we're actually worshiping something less than ourselves, not something more.

[11 : 02] So the first thing, then, is it's the essence of humanity to be created. But the second thing is, why are we created? We are created for a relationship with God.

Verse 27, he created man, verse 26, in our image and after our likeness. Image is often used of physical replicas and likeness of models or plans.

There's a variation of the same thing. Now, if we have to be like God, what is God like? Now, these two chapters of Genesis tell us something of what God is like and this dominates the rest of the Bible.

First of all, God is far greater than us. He is up there. That's what chapter 1 is about. Without apparent effort, the whole of the universe bursts into life.

That wonderful little phrase in verse 16, God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. They're not called the sun and the moon, probably because the sun and the moon were gods and goddesses to the ancient world.

[12 : 13] They're simply called the great lights. And then there's the strobe of rays and the stars, almost of a kind of afterthought, a little thing for the creator to do. And yet, what discoveries could be made in astrophysics or science which could set aside that little phrase, also the stars?

He's up there, far greater than us. We need to, and we need to, as the psalmist says, fall down on our faces and worship him. But he's also down here, as we'll see next week in chapter 2.

He becomes, he comes down and eventually he's going to become one of us. And that, the whole gospel we see is there in these first three chapters of Genesis.

God up there comes down here into the story and when the image is, when the image is damaged, when things go disastrously wrong, then he is going to provide a savior who is going to put everything right.

He's going to restore the image. He is going to return. I was going to say return the universe to what it was before. He's going to do far more than that.

[13 : 26] He's not simply going to return to Eden. It's going to be greater and more glorious. Now, first of all, look at, look once again at verse, this time at verse 28.

God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Now, whole books have been written on what the image of God is. But as it's starkest and it's simplest, but it's also very profound, of course, there are two things about the image of God.

First of all, we are made for relationship. That's the point of be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God wants other images of himself to be produced throughout the world.

We'll see a bit more about that next week, about relationships. And also, the second thing is to have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.

[14 : 35] Now, that remains true, although we have treated the earth very badly often. When you think of dust bowls and acid rain and I don't know whether climate warming is true or false, nobody in this room will ever be around in the hundreds of years ahead to know whether that's the case.

And sometimes, we have been very ruthless and exploited the earth, exploited the creatures of the earth. And that's why in the pictures of the new creation, we have pictures, for example, of the wolf lying down with the lamb, little child playing at the serpent's den, and so on.

And in the desert, Jesus is with the wild animals. Not that they're a threat to him, but that he, as the perfect human, is able to subdue these animals.

There are no terror to him, a picture of what it will be like in the new creation. There are these two things, the relationship which will produce other images, and the caring for the earth.

And that is what the destiny of redeemed humanity is to be, to care for the earth. Adam and Eve were created to rule the earth. And that's what the New Testament says God's people will do.

[15:54] We will reign with Christ. Now, forget about marble thrones and gold crowns. That's not what it's about. What it's about is caring for his creation.

He hasn't changed his mind. He's going to renew his creation and he's going to bring about a situation where humanity, redeemed humanity, will do what Adam and Eve failed to do, to care for creation.

And the other thing, of course, is the relationship with God is one of speaking. Right at the, I mean, after all, this chapter is dominated by God said, God said, God said.

God speaks in verse, God blessed them and God said to them. Notice that God's first words are words of, are words of, spoken for people's benefit.

He blessed them. Now, blessed doesn't mean, doesn't mean something vague like he said, oh, go away and, go away and feel happy. Blessed means, go and be the people I have created you to be.

[17:03] That's what blessing is about. Blessing is about fulfilling in our lives what God has created us to be and the power to fulfill the role.

So, God speaks and when God speaks, that first speech is a speech of blessing and indeed, in these first two chapters, the words are all of blessing.

There is warning, as we'll see, but there is blessing. And, when God speaks in blessing, things happen. Just as when he speaks in judgment, things happen.

And, the third thing I want to say is, humanity is already created with an inbuilt future perspective.

And, that's why we went on to read, that's why we went on to read into chapter 2, verses 1 to 3.

I've always thought that ought to be part of chapter 1 anyway. Remember, the chapter divisions are not inspired. It'd make far more sense to finish chapter 1, chapter 2, verse 3.

[18:07] Anyway, be that as it may, there is a future perspective. God rested, God created people for the Sabbath rest on the seventh day.

There is no eighth day because the seventh day speaks about eternity, speaks about the future.

That is what the seventh day is about. Now, I'm not going to go into the various interpretations of the six days of creation and so on.

That would take us too far away from our subject, but it's very clear that there is this inbuilt future perspective made for the Sabbath. You see, work is not an end in itself.

Work is not evil, of course. There was work in Eden. There will be work in the new creation, his servant, says John in Revelation, will serve him and they will see his face.

Work, as we'll see in a couple of weeks' time, only becomes a curse because of the fall. Now, most people here will have worked or will still be working and so on, but the point is, work can bring a great deal of pleasure.

[19:18] However much you enjoy your job, though, however happy you are in it, however fulfilled you may be in it, there are always times when you get tired, when you get weary, and that's because we live in a fallen world.

And part of the tragedy of our society often is far too many people can't find work to do. And there are others who are working far too hard.

You see, it's a broken world. And suppose, I mean, I know the National Health Service is never out of the news just now. But, you can't just take somebody who has lost, say, a job as a builder's labourer and so, by the way, as a job for a brain surgeon.

That's not, by the way, that's no criticism or no disparagement of the building site worker. Just saying, it's in a fallen world, it's impossible to have enough jobs for everybody to do or the right jobs. Some people spend their lives doing boring jobs like stocking supermarket shelves and so on. But, work is, work is part of humanity.

[20:32] But work is not the aim. It is, after all, rest, which is the aim of creation. God rested. Now, rested, of course, doesn't mean God did nothing.

The Bible would have come to an abrupt halt if God had rested in the sense of doing nothing else. Rest is, rest, as we know, is not doing nothing.

Rest is essentially doing what we love to do. Doing it without pressure, doing it without strain and stress. And that will be the new creation.

There will be no, there will be no, conflict between work and leisure as there is now. That's what we are made. We are made for the Sabbath rest.

Remember, Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man, not man, for the Sabbath. That was, there remains a rest for the people of God. There's a letter to the Hebrews.

[21 : 32] We are made for relationships because, remember, the image of God is male and female. which means, among other things, that some, that being male and being female correspond to deep realities in the being of God.

They're not just social constructs, as people try to say nowadays, as people try to say that sexuality is simply a matter of what you choose to be. Now, I know we're in a fallen world.

I know there are problems in that area as in every other area. But essentially, God created us male and female, created us for each other and, above all, for him.

And it's only in Christ, of course, that we become truly human. Only in the one who is one with God and one of us.

So, when we finish then, let me just make three points. I know I've made three points already, but I'm going to make another three. But if you want to be pedantic, consider a six-point talk.

[22 : 37] We are made for God. We cannot have happiness and fulfillment without him. The great church teacher and pastor Augustine said, Lord, you have made us for yourselves and our hearts can find no rest until they find it in you.

Which, of course, is echoing Ecclesiastes. God has put eternity in our hearts. Secondly, it is a biblical view of humanity. We are created.

We are not self-sufficient. We didn't make ourselves and we can't sustain ourselves. And therefore, there's need for obedience and love. And finally, we are made not just for this present world.

We're made for the world to come. And that's what the Bible says about being human. Amen. Let's pray. Father, how often as human beings we want to be self-sufficient.

We want to do our own thing. We say, it's our time, our bodies, we can do what we like. Teach us, Lord, that our true fulfillment, our true happiness is in obedience and love and growing into the full likeness of Christ.

[23 : 54] and we pray that this study today and the other ones in the weeks to come will help us. In Jesus' name. Amen.