

The Beginning: The Crown & Calling of Creation

Genesis 1:26-28

At some point in life most people will wrestle with the “Big Questions” of life. It seems like we don’t do a great job of talking about those big questions publicly in the United States, but did you know in the UK they have a television show called “The Big Questions” where they bring in people from different religions and perspectives and they debate questions of meaning, purpose, and existence.

Two of the most gigantic questions we all have to ask ourselves are: Who am I? Why am I here? These are questions of identity and purpose. I said a minute ago that in America we don’t do a great job of talking about these questions in public and we really don’t. But, people will not completely avoid these questions, and everyone lives out of his or her answers to these questions, even if they can’t articulate their answers. Everyone has a sense of identity and everyone feels the need for a sense of purpose. We don’t want to be useless.

Obviously as believers we want our sense of identity and purpose to be determined by the clear teaching of God’s Word. I think you find God’s clear answer to these two questions in Genesis 1 and these answers inform the rest of how you read your Bible. So, open your Bibles to Genesis 1:26-28 this morning and I’m going to do things a bit different this morning. I’m going to give you a 1 sentence summary of what this passage teaches and then we’re going to divide up the sentence and look at each individual piece in order to find our identity and purpose on earth. **The crown of creation has a calling for creation that magnifies the Lord of creation.**

1. Who is the Crown of Creation?

Last week we looked at the creation week as a whole and this week we want to narrow in on the climax or crown of creation on day 6. The creation of mankind. The rhythm of the narrative changes here in verse 26 when God says, “Let us make man.” The number of words in the account given to the creation of man far exceeds any other aspect of creation. The whole week has led to this.

You can even see this when you get into chapter 2. Next week we will study Genesis 2:4-25, which is a detailed account of the creation of mankind on day 6. So, you have the 30,000 foot view in chapter 1 of the whole creation story. Then

in chapter 2 Moses recounts the most important part of that story, the beginning of mankind. In all the orderliness and beauty of creation, human beings are the masterpiece. Now, I don't say this to build up your ego this morning, but only to place who we are in the proper biblical perspective.

But, we don't only understand man's identity as the crown or apex of creation from the number of words used to describe his creation. We see this most clearly from the particular words used. Look at 1:26a. Humans are made in the image and likeness of God. In the ancient world they viewed kings as made in the image of the god they served. The king was a representative of the god and he ruled over the realm as the representative. But here in Genesis, God makes every human in his image, not just kings.

Every single human being has inherent worth and value because of this reality. Listen to a couple of other passages that point us to this value. Genesis 9:6. The life of a human is valuable and should be treated as such. Why? Because every human being is made in the image of God. Listen to James 3:8-9. James says that even mocking and cursing another human with your words is not appropriate because humans are made in the image of God.

Of course, this truth has all sorts of ethical ramifications for issues we face today. We believe abortion is the taking of a human life and that is wrong because humans are made in God's image. Any sort of racism or racial superiority is inherently wrong because every person is made in God's image. The outworking's of the image of God in our lives even extends to how we speak about other humans, as we saw in James.

But, what does it actually mean to be made in God's image? Over the years people have tried all sorts of different ways to explain this. Probably the most common one you hear is that human beings are rational, which is what separates us from animals, so to be made in the image of God means to be made a rational, thinking being. Maybe you've heard that being made in the image of God means sharing characteristics with God. God is loving, we can love. God is just, therefore we long for justice.

The reality is that we don't know from this passage exactly what it means to be made in the image of God but being made as an image-bearer does tell us something incredibly helpful about human identity and meaning.

An image is always dependent on the original for identity and purpose. The fact that something is an image means it is a copy in some sense. A model car depends on the original for its shape and recognition. The mirror reflects what is placed in front of it. One author said it this way: "*Human identity is rooted in what it reflects.*" - Richard Lints

You see this tendency to reflect or image in children and adults. Our 2 year old Grey is growing and exploring his world and he mainly does this by copying what he sees his older siblings and parents do. Even as adults we tend to copy fashion trends and home décor of people we admire. It's what we were designed to be.

We can only make sense of ourselves as image bearers, copies of the original. This means that we can only be who we were made to be in relationship with God as a proper reflection of Him. Our hearts were made to worship God, to know and love Him. We were made to find our identity, meaning, and purpose in covenantal relationship with God as reflections of Him.

But, when we take that built in desire for satisfaction and meaning and fix it on some created object or goal, we have become idolaters. The Bible speaks at length about the sin of idolatry. What is the first of the 10 commandments? "You shall have no other gods before me." Tim Keller defines idolatry as taking some incomplete joy of this world and building your life on it. In other words, it's trying to find your identity and purpose in something other than God. Two things happen when we fix our search for meaning on something else and become idolaters:

First, that search for meaning will fail. Idolatry happens when we take our natural human identity as a mirror and turn the mirror onto something other than God. We place our worship, desires, hopes, and identity on something in creation. But created things are not thick enough to support our worship and for us to find satisfaction in, so we inevitably lose meaning and joy.

Second, as image bearers, we begin to be shaped by what we are admiring or worshiping. It's not just that you are worshiping something else that is tragic, but you will begin to resemble that which you worship. You will be changed by trying to find identity in something other than God.

Listen to how the Psalmist describes this in Psalm 115:2-8. Another author put it this way: *"What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration."* - G.K. Beale

So, let me ask you this morning. What is your identity? How do you define yourself? Are you looking to money, family, work, or pleasure to provide meaning? Our culture is filled with people searching for identity. And our culture is filled with people who are being changed and shaped by the idols they are finding identity in. As the crown of God's creation we were placed here to reflect him and that means understanding our calling. Let me remind you of our summary sentence. **The crown of creation has a calling for creation that magnifies the Lord of creation.**

2. What Calling does he have?

Look at 1:26. You can see that God gives mankind, the crown of his creation, a task. This task or calling is given to mankind BECAUSE of his royal status as God's image and likeness. Remember how I told you that in the ancient near east kings were thought to be images of the gods? Well, this verse actually should read like this: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, so that he may have dominion."

Verse 26 gives us the summary of the task of mankind on earth. The calling is to take dominion, to rule in God's stead. But then verse 27 slows down into poetry and reflects on that reality and shows us how mankind can fulfill that task. Let's read verse 27. So, you can see twice mentioned there that humans are made in the image of God. They are royal representatives of God and the last phrase tells us that they are made male and female. So, both men and women are made in the image of God and they are given this task together and can only accomplish it together. So, what is the calling of human beings in more detail? Let's read verse 28.

You can see there are 5 commands here that come in two groups. I'll show you on the screen. The first three basically give the same task to humans to have children and fill the earth with image bearers and the second two give the task of taking dominion and ruling over the earth to humans. So, going back to the poetry of verse 27 we find the foundational aspects of mankind that allow them to

complete this calling. We are made in the image of God as God's royal representatives to rule and we are made male and female to fill the earth.

Of course, you will notice that verse 28 begins with God's hand of blessing on these tasks. This is all according to God's overseeing plans and purposes. So, to summarize the calling of the crown of creation we would say that human beings are to work together to fill the earth with image bearers who will be God's royal representatives as they take dominion over creation and make the entire earth a dwelling place for God to dwell with mankind. What are some of the implications of this calling? Let's look at 3.

First, we were made to live as social beings. God made humans male and female. Both are necessary and bring complementary roles to the task of filling the earth. Being male or female is not merely a psychological state. It's hard wired into our identity as image bearers. Every cell in your body identifies you as male or female. Of course, the implication of multiplying is that there will be more humans on earth as time goes on and that they will have to organize themselves into societies and cultures and live and work together to accomplish God's mission.

So, within this sphere of social life we have every instance of life together from family life to political life. We live in a hyper individualized culture, but God has made us to live with one another and we can only truly flourish and fulfill His mission by learning to live and work together.

Second, we are made to rule over creation by work. Notice in verse 28 the two commands God gives to mankind, to subdue the earth and take dominion over it. Both of these words have the idea of royal authority. Notice that humans are not only to rule over the animals but are to subdue the earth as well. What does this mean? Well, it can be tempting to think of the command to subdue as to defeat a hostile enemy. But our work is patterned after God's work. What pattern do we see in God's work of creation?

Remember that in Genesis 1:2 the earth was void and inhospitable to human life and natural beauty. Then, in the days of creation God was always cultivating and developing the creation. It goes from void in 1:2 to a generalized backdrop in days 1-3 to specific forms of life in days 4-6. God develops and cultivates and now he passes that task on to human beings. Think of the work a gardener does, like Adam in the Garden. He doesn't just leave the plants as they are. He figures out

what plants work well when planted near each other. He knows what time of year is best in which to plant daffodils. The gardener cultivates and develops the raw materials of creation to produce beauty and flourishing.

But this command to subdue and take dominion extends far beyond gardening. Here's how Tim Keller describes the task given to mankind: *"It is rearranging the raw material of God's creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, and people in particular, thrive and flourish."* – Tim Keller

This applies to farming, music, medicine, manufacturing, and every other type of work that is good and God-honoring. Think about the process of making that car that brought you to church today. Some of you could speak with much more authority than me, but that car is basically a pile of raw materials like steel, rubber, and metal that have been put together in a way that benefits people.

God has put us here to bring order to the world by our work. Your job is not just something you do to stay busy between Sundays or to make sure you are fed and clothed. Your job is an important part of why God has you here. Work brings honor to God when we serve others by using the gifts of creation God has given to benefit people.

Third, all of this is done to magnify the God who created it all. We are made as image bearers to live in covenant relationship with God and so all of our social relationships and work must be rightly ordered to Him. This brings us back to our summary sentence that defines human identity and purpose. **The crown of creation has a calling for creation that magnifies the Lord of creation.**

When we live out this calling, God is truly honored. It may surprise you to know this, but Psalm 8 is a Psalm of David where He is clearly meditating on Genesis 1:26-28. Let's read this Psalm together. Notice how it begins and ends, with God's name being majestic in all the earth. How is God's name magnified in all the earth? Listen.

It's through humans living out their identity and purpose that God is magnified.