

In God's image

Part 1

Genesis 1:26-31

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."

*²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸ 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."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

The other night we were watching "A Current Affair". There was this story about a woman who was at the site of a fatal car crash and she stole the handbag of a woman dying in the car, and went on a spending spree. They interviewed one of the family members who said "who could be so inhuman?" Amy turned to me and said, "It is inhuman to steal? Or is theft a trait that is particularly human? Its only humans that can knowingly take something that's not theirs. In fact is theft not proof of that person's humanity?"

She shared this with me and I replied: "shhh, The Block's starting soon."

This passage in Genesis 1, has intrigued scholars for centuries. What does it mean to say humanity is made in God's image? What does this mean for how we define humanity? How we define what is humane and what is not

And tonight I want to have a bit of a look at this question: What does it mean for us to be made in God's image? What does this mean for how we understand our place in the world, our place over creation, our place before God?

There are many ways commentators have understood "in God's image". Some think its talking in a physical sense, standing upright, all that. Some think of it in a moral rational and spiritual sense, that we mirror God with our ability to hold to morals, think rationally and to have a spiritual life. Some say it's about self-awareness, that we are self-aware of our existence, like God is.

All of these ideas are valid and right in one way or another. I'm not so sure about looking physically like God but we all have one thing in common. They all say that if you look deeply with us, within yourself, you will see the image of God. That as we are born, God's image exists there, lying dormant or undetected. And without knowing it we have it.

But I want to put a different idea forward tonight: What if the image of God isn't something that we just are... but it's something that we become?

I think what makes us made in the image of God, what separates us from all creation is that we are creatures made for relationship, with a God who is all about relationship. As you read through Genesis 1-3 the one thing that keeps coming up is relationship

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."

God places us in a relationship with creation, he give us a created order as stewards, to rule and keep.

Genesis 2:18

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Why is it not good for Adam to be alone? Because we are made for relationship. It is part of our design, just as a car is made for driving and a chair is made for sitting – humanity is made for relationship.

In the Fall, Adam and Eve's sin is the breakdown of relationship – the breakdown of trust between humanity and God, the bonds of relationship.

In Relationship we become what we were made to be. In relationship we find our humanity and we see the image of God.

There is this kid's story called the Velveteen Rabbit, like a Toy Story idea, where children's toys talk to each other. But in this book they ask big questions about existence, what it means to be real.

The rabbit asks the toy horse, "what is real" what does it mean to be real?

Horse replies "real isn't how you're made, it's what happens to you. You become real when a child plays with you and really comes to love you. Then you're real."

Rabbit says "does it hurt?" Horse replies "sometimes".

"Does it happen all at once?"

"It generally takes a long time, once you're all worn out, furs hanging off, your eye is loose, then you have become truly real."

The stuffed rabbit becomes real when it's in a relationship with a child.

Who here has turned the car around driven back 30 min to the shop to find bunny? Because that bunny is not just a stuffed bunny, it your child's bunny. It has real values, it has real experiences, real personality, can't be replaced. In relationship it becomes real. Just as in relationship we become real, we become made in God's image.

Paul the apostle says in Colossians 1:15

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

In Jesus we see the image of God, what the image of God looks like in human form. If this is true, we only start to realise the image of God in us as we move towards Christ. The more we are made in the image of Christ the more we full fill the image of God.

Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 (God's word)

¹⁸ As all of us reflect the Lord's glory We are being changed into his image with ever-increasing glory.

The image that Paul is using here is of a mirror, where he says reflect. That as we come into the right proximity to the mirror, stand at the right angle, we can see this reflection. So as we come into the right proximity to Jesus we reflect the image of God. Its through relationship that we come close to God.

Jesus says in John 15

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus calls us into deep relationship. The word friend here, isn't really strong enough is it? Because for Jesus he speaks of laying down his life for his friend. Now I have 406 friends on Facebook but I don't think many would lay down their lives for me. But the friendship Jesus is talking about, is a deep relationship, like when people speak of their friends and say, he's not a friend he's family.

Being in proximity to Jesus, in relationship, we become what we are made to be. We find the image of God, not from within, but radiated onto us from Christ.

The Image of God looks like relationship... because it's found in relationship. I am who I am in relationship to Christ. Through relationship I find God's image in me and I live out my purpose and design by becoming what God has made me to be.

In the US in San Antonio, there was a famous battle called the Alamo. A couple of hundred men fought off 1500 Mexican soldiers and all the defenders died.

In the site which has become museum is a picture of one of the fighters with this inscription:

James Butler Bonham. This portrait is of his nephew, Major James Bonham, deceased, who greatly resembled his uncle, no picture of James Butler Bonham exists. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom.

No picture of Jesus exists, but the likeness of Christ is seen in all who follow his ways.

We are going to look at being in God's image over the next 3 weeks. With this idea at the core of our thinking, that the image of God is something you become, not something you are. That we are on a journey, a journey in relationship with Christ, to find our purpose, meet our potential.

I want to look at how we can be transformed into the image God has for us. What God's plans are for his people, his family made in his image.