

# Image Created

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 October 2023

Preacher: Mark Stirling

- [ 0 : 00 ]     And would you pray with me again just before we dig in further into this? Lord, I'm conscious of the responsibility it is to come and to speak from your word.
- And I pray you set a guard over my mouth that nothing that comes out of it would do any harm. That you would use these words to build up and encourage these brothers and sisters.
- Oh Lord, please would you have your way with us in this time. Would your spirit teach us, open our ears to hear what you would say.
- And give us hearts to respond rightly to the living God. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now today, these two sessions are going to be, there will be a little bit more content in them than tomorrow morning.
- Tomorrow morning is a normal church service. So just to reassure Graham, who kind of looks a bit panicky at the thought of this. But the great thing about today is obviously you can ask questions.
- [ 1 : 09 ]     And so if there's something you're not getting straight away, don't worry about it. Maybe just make a note or write a question, send that in. So really let's use that Q&A; time that we have immediately after lunch.
- If there's something you don't get or there's something that strikes you or there's an implication of something that really you want to explore a little bit further. These issues that we're going to be looking at today, we're going to start with this first session really on the image created.
- The creation account and the new creation account. And that's very important that we put Revelation in there as well. And we'll see why in a minute or two. Then the second session this morning is going to be on what's gone wrong, the image marred.
- And then tomorrow, I'll decide sometime later today exactly how we'll do it. But it'll be image restored. And what is it that God's doing about that?
- And what does that look like? One of the key issues of the day, it seems to me, is this question of identity. What is a person? It seems to be being asked everywhere.
- [ 2 : 18 ]     And the lack of a good answer to that, a robust answer to it, really does leave us struggling when we're trying to make decisions about what's right and what's wrong. And how we should decide these kind of things.
- So this question of what is a human person, how should a human flourish, what are the conditions that are conducive to human persons flourishing, doing well, doing what they're made to do.
- How we answer those questions are then going to affect how we make decisions on ethical issues of the day. Whether that's issues of assistive technology or IT or whatever.
- You can think of multiple issues. But how we answer that question also has a bearing on things like how we think human society should be governed. How we should be led and what that might look like.

What are the limits on it? How we should educate children. What marriage and family should look like. In fact, pretty much everything, the future of civilization, depends on how we answer these questions.

[ 3 : 27 ] There's a lot at stake in how we think about these issues. I want to save just a little bit to frame this discussion, first of all, about this question of identity.

Because it's such a buzzword these days. Everybody's using it. And I'm not sure that we all quite know what we mean by it. We keep using that word, but I'm not sure it means what we think it means.

So what is this idea of identity? Is it something that we choose? Or is it something that is given to us? And obviously the Bible has some key responses to that kind of question.

Is identity even a thing? One of the things I'm going to suggest to us is that, in fact, the concept of identity, we've made a mistake by making it a kind of thing that you have.

Actually, I think it's probably more helpful to think about identity as a way of answering some of the key questions of life. So questions like, who is God?

[ 4 : 30 ] Who am I? What am I for? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Is there any purpose to my life? Do I matter?

And can I be loved? And am I loved? Now these seems to me are the kind of core questions, the key questions of life. Who am I? What am I for?

Where am I going? And do I matter? Does any of this matter? And how we answer those questions is going to then affect how we live.

People in this cultural moment are being told that this question of identity is defined by some sort of internal felt sense.

Now, that is problematic in all kinds of ways, not least because our internal felt sense is something that is malleable and changes through time.

[ 5 : 30 ] And actually can also be quite easily deceived. We can get it wrong. I might feel that I'm like an international rugby player, but I've not been chosen for Scotland.

So somebody else disagrees with my felt sense of identity. I'm sure some of you have wasted time watching bad X Factor auditions where you have somebody who thinks they're a fantastic singer until they get up and sing and everybody else begs to differ with their judgment.

It's a kind of obvious thing to say, isn't it, that how we feel internally really doesn't define reality. But identity is something that's being talked about as though that were the case in our particular moment.

Answering this list of identity questions, though, I think is a much more helpful way of going about things. Who's God? Who am I? What am I for? Am I even for anything? Where am I going?

And am I, can I be loved? One of the key things then to say about this question of identity is that if our internal felt sense of things, and I'm packing a lot in here in a very condensed manner, if my internal felt sense of who I am is not necessarily a reliable guide to the reality of who I am, then how on earth can I know who I am?

[ 6 : 55 ] How on earth can I answer these kind of questions? And the answer to that really is that I can only know if I am known. That identity actually is something that's a relational concept.

I can actually only know myself as I am known by others and as they feed back to me as I relate to them. And one of the key things then, and this is preparing the way for us talking about creation and fall and so on, is that there is one, and this is good news that Christian faith brings to this question.

There is one who knows us and knows us perfectly. There is nothing about us that he doesn't know. The God of the universe who created in the first place knows everything about every single one of us.

That means that there are no surprises for him. He's not going to discover something about you or me tomorrow that's going to make him go, ugh, didn't know he was like that.

The one who knows us perfectly and loves us perfectly in that knowledge of who we really are. It's beginning to sound like good news.

[ 8 : 09 ] But the key thing is that this one who knows us perfectly and loves us perfectly also speaks and speaks truth into our lives so that we can relate to him and others rightly and live rightly in his world.

So that's where this question of identity requires the answers from somebody who knows and who knows better than we can know ourselves.

That's all by way of framing where we're going to go. Who's the one who knows us then, we might say? What's he like? What does he want from us?

And does he need us? I want to say a little bit about that. The passage that we've just read, and I think I've got a slide slightly out of order. Yeah, it is out of order.

Never mind. In the beginning, God. It's tempting just to rush past that. In the beginning, God.

[ 9 : 11 ] The Bible teaches this idea of creation out of nothing. That God didn't take stuff that was already there. He created out of nothing.

And there's lots to say then about who this God is as we're thinking about him as the creator. The God who is in the beginning, is self-existent, is full and eternally satisfied before creation, outside of creation.

That's got huge implications for the way we think about it. One of the ways we're tempted to think about the creation account is God, if you like, kind of sitting there thinking, it's a bit lonely around here.

It'd be nice to have some kids around the joint. That's not at all how the Bible presents God creating. God doesn't need anything.

Let's just stop and think about this for a second. That the God who creates doesn't need to create. He doesn't become more fully God by creating.

[ 10 : 22 ] He doesn't gain anything he doesn't have. It doesn't complete him in any sort of way. It doesn't give him relationships that he doesn't already have. The eternally full, eternally satisfied God, eternally rich in fellowship as the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, creates out of pure, lavish, overflowing generosity and love.

Now, just to go from what is mind-blowing theology to practical pastoral concerns for a second, just think about the implications of that for the way that you relate to God moment by moment, day by day this coming week.

You relate to the God who didn't create you to do something for him as though he needed it. You don't relate to a God who lacks something, who is deficient in some kind of way and needs you.

You relate to the God who is eternally full and satisfied and pours out of that fullness in lavish generosity towards his creatures.

In other words, God is not like us, but a bit bigger. It's not like that father who's critical of you when you don't pull through for him or the boss who's ready to shout at you when you don't do things exactly right.

[ 11 : 52 ] In fact, it's not like any human relationship that we know. The one who needs nothing gives lavishly everything to us.

And pastely, boy, that makes every difference in the world. In fact, you could say that almost all of the pastoral issues, all the relational issues that we encounter day by day are because somehow we haven't grasped the enormity of this God in all of his lavish fullness pouring out grace towards us.

And somehow we relate to a God who we think kind of we're doing him a bit of a favor or we're getting something from him by the way that we behave.

So we're starting with this doctrine of God because it's an incredibly important place to start. There's some scriptures, and I'm going to skip through some of these rather quickly.

And by the way, I'm looking at you, Keita. What time do you want me to stop? Because if you don't tell me to stop, I'll just rattle on quite happily.

[ 13 : 00 ] Right. Okay. Half past. Roughly? Yeah. Half past. Right. Okay. So, Graeme, you're now responsible for stopping me sometime soon.

Okay. Genesis 1-1 we've seen already. These are other scriptures that would begin to address the same thing. I'll put some of these on the screen. But the idea of being created is absolutely crucial.

There's the Hebrew there just for a bit of fun. Bereshit bara Elohim et ha-shamayin v'et ha-arets. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

God is not part of creation, not completed by it, does not need it. It is entirely dependent upon him and his lavish, overflowing goodness.

I've just put up there, and I won't take time to read it, but Isaiah 6, just to develop this theme further. Isaiah 6 is the famous passage where we have the throne room vision where Isaiah encounters God in the throne room.

[ 14 : 12 ] And we have all these living creatures that are flying around. And we see this echoed further on in Revelation chapters 4 and 5. But the point about this is that when Isaiah encounters God, his response to meeting with God is, Woe is me, I am unmade, literally.

Not just I'm undone, I am unraveled, I'm unmade because I've just encountered God. It sometimes makes me wonder when we come together to worship and to praise like this.

And sometimes rather lightly we pray, Lord, would your presence be with us? And we forget these kinds of visions. If we were to encounter God in unmediated fashion, we would be undone as Isaiah was.

We think about this God then, who elicits a woe to me, I am undone, I have unclean lips, I live amongst the people with unclean lips.

And of course what happens then is that the living creature takes coal from the altar, cleanses Isaiah's lips, and then sends him out on a mission to declare who this God is to his people and to call him to repentance.

[ 15 : 31 ] Interesting that Jesus takes the words that Isaiah is given and says to his disciples, This is why I teach in parables, but interesting that it's Jesus saying, I am the one who fulfills that.

Here's another couple of texts from Isaiah 45. This is what the Lord says, He who created the heavens, he's God, he fashioned and made the earth, founded it.

He didn't create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited. He also says, Turn to me and be saved, you ends of the earth. I am God, there's no other.

By myself I've sworn, my mouth is uttered. Before me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear. It's fascinating, that passage, by the way, in Isaiah 45, is the one that Paul takes in Philippians 2 and applies to Jesus.

And applies to Jesus, who is the one who became incarnate and lived as a human person and as a servant and suffered all the way to death on the cross.

[ 16 : 39 ] And Paul says, Therefore God gives him the name above every name and applies Isaiah 45 to him. In other words, Jesus is the demonstration of this God.

And Jesus' humility, servanthood and death are the supreme demonstration of the giving nature of this God. The God who needs nothing and pours everything out toward others.

We might add Colossians 1, where Paul talks about Christ as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn. In him all things were created.

It's legitimate to go back and then reread Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And think about Paul's reflection in Christ.

All things were created and see the Son and the Spirit and the Father together in that action of creation. It's a beautiful picture.

[ 17 : 42 ] There's some key ideas just there that God is not like us, but bigger. We need to be really careful about how we think about God. His eternity, his fullness, his self-sufficiency mean that he doesn't need anything from us.

He creates then out of lavish generosity, which is great good news for how we then relate to him. There's nothing that we can give to God or deprive him of in his fullness.

And that is pastorally great news for how we relate to him. And he creates us and knows us fully as his creatures. And furthermore, he's utterly good and trustworthy.

Now, these are all framing comments before we get into this biblical big story. I'm just going to quickly outline that as a framework for thinking, as a framework for thinking.

That's us thinking about the God who creates. Some of the implications of that we're beginning to touch on for the way we think about who we are, what we're for, where we're going, why that matters.

[ 18 : 54 ] The Bible can be considered as a big picture. Not everything in the scripture fits into this particular framework, but it's a helpful way of thinking about creation.

And then something goes wrong with that good creation that God makes. God is in the business of redeeming that. And as we read already, this story is going somewhere towards a destination.

I have just a little diagram I use, which I find helpful. And if you don't, that's fine. But creation, fall, new creation, and God's in the business of redeeming the stuff that he made.

We'll see much more about fall in this second session later. So creation, let's dig in a little bit more to the Genesis account. Genesis 1 to 3 is foundational to any view of reality that is biblical.

It's really important that we engage with what was read there, that we read these texts, listen to what they're saying. That framework I've just given gives us a framework for evaluating the whole of life and culture.

[ 20 : 07 ] There's nothing that lies outside of God's creative activity. Nothing that isn't his stuff. Genesis 1.26 is the pinnacle of that passage.

If you read through it, I was reading back through it again this morning. And it's just so striking, that creation account. The different aspects of creation.

And God's pronouncement at the end of each day, God looked or God watched, He saw, and it was good. It was good. It was good.

And then in the sixth day, let us make man an image in our likeness. And God makes man.

And the way that the whole text works, the way it's structured, this is the high point in this literary text. And it's intended to say something to us, that mankind then is the pinnacle of God's creation.

- [ 21 : 15 ] The only thing in the whole of creation that's described as being an image, likeness of God Himself. The living creatures are described as being living souls, the nefesh chayah. But only mankind is an image and likeness. And it's after that sixth day, all of that creative activity, that God looks at it and says, it is exceedingly good.
- It's very, very good. And it's worth just pausing a second.
- Obviously, I'm sure many of you are familiar with a lot of the debate and discussion that has centered on Genesis chapter 1. It's a text that's been massively under attack in all kinds of ways.
- And I don't want to go too far into that, except just to say this. Clearly, Genesis 1 is telling us some things that are true.
- [ 22 : 23 ] Now, the details of it, how it happened, when it happened, how long it took, there are endless books and discussions out there that you can go and look at.
- I have a view on that, but I'm not sure that that's the point of the passage. The point of the passage is primarily this. God made it. It's His stuff.
- It's good. And it's accountable to Him. He made it with a purpose. He made it out of His goodness. And He made it out of nothing.
- And therefore, He's the one who's in charge of it all. And it is His. It belongs to Him. That's the key thing that Genesis 1 is giving us.
- There's more to it, though. This idea of being made, then, an image and likeness. And this is us beginning to focus in. What does image, likeness mean?
- [ 23 : 24 ] It's a really interesting phrase. And there's been, again, as you could imagine, lots of discussion about it. It's interesting to take this image and likeness and to relate it to New Testament passages that speak about imitating God.
- Because clearly, if we're made in image and likeness, well, what does that mean? Does it mean that we are creators like He is? That we do the stuff He does?
- Well, it doesn't seem so. Sub-creators, we are creative, clearly. We are relational as He is.
- One commentator said it like this. Man is an expression or transcription of the eternal incorporeal creator in terms of temporal, bodily, creaturely existence.
- I don't know how helpful that is, but God has made us in resemblance, representation, relationship. What's fascinating when we look at the imitation passages in the New Testament is that that imitation is imitation of the pattern of the way that Christ, as the one who supremely images God, it's the imitation of the pattern of self-giving love.
- [ 24 : 45 ] That's how the New Testament really focuses in on what it is to be image bearers and then to be restored image bearers. But when God creates an image in likeness to Him, He also gives tasks to do.
- He gives a commission. Some people have called this the cultural mandate. Because what He says is essentially go and do good things with the stuff I've made.
- Go and take this stuff and build pews with it. Go and write books and develop your written language.
- Go and make computers eventually. Go and do stuff. This mandate as representatives of God to His creation.
- And that's probably one of the key things that we are told to have dominion. A word that many of us will struggle with because it sounds too much like domination.
- [ 25 : 54 ] And the idea of domination and power and its use, there's lots of things to say about that. But dominion is a much different concept to that.

It's the idea of the right use of power. A use of power that reflects the nature of the God who needs nothing but pours out everything for His creation.

So the dominion is to look after. It's to take charge of this creation and to treat it well on behalf of the God who made it and says it's very good.

It's not to exploit and destroy for selfish ends. That would be a violation of God's character, a misrepresentation of His character to His creation.

It's to represent the good God to the rest of His creation. Dominion is a wonderful concept. I think about this with regard to our stupid Doug, Theo.

[ 27 : 00 ] He's a wee rescue colleague. And if he was here right now, he'd be going around wanting attention from everybody because he loves people. But I've also had to train him so that he doesn't go chasing after cyclists and runners.

And I can train him. And when I click my fingers, he'll come around and he comes and he walks beside me. He's desperate to get after that cyclist still, but he'll come around and he'll walk beside me.

And I was just thinking, isn't that just a lovely thing that this little stupid dog loves people and actually flourishes best when a human person tells him what he can and can't do?

I've got to tell him not to eat horse poo. I mean, what sort of stupid animal is that? But he has to be told that. And I'm exercising dominion at that point over this animal.

And of course, that's true of the way we treat all animals. This idea of being made in the image is then to represent the character of this God to creation.

[ 28 : 02 ] That's a pretty serious matter. It's one of the reasons that the misuse of power in exploitative ways is such an affront to God because it misrepresents him, not just to other human persons, but to the whole of his creation.

And we can see all the damage that that has done to creation. That is an affront. It's a blasphemy, if you like. This cultural mandate then involves the stewardship of creation, looking after it well.

Dominion over that creation. Ruling it and stewarding it and representing God's good character to it.

There's a number of texts that we could go into in more depth. We'll run out of time. I'll just give you them so you can look at them yourself. But that's Psalm 8. What's man?

You're mindful of him. Son of man. You care for him. You've made him little lower than the heavenly beings. Crowned him with glory and honor. Given him dominion over the works of your hands. So that when we go out from here to our work or to our family life or to our gardens, we're exercising dominion.

[ 29 : 19 ] We're representing the character of God in all of these places, in all that we do. I hope you can begin to see how that dignifies every endeavor that we engage in.

The way that we do our work, the way that we cook our food, the way we set a table or look after a garden. These are all expressions of this mandate to look after the things that God made on his behalf.

Nothing, in other words, doesn't matter. Everything matters to the God who made it all with such lavish generosity and such lavish diversity.

Any of you ever been scuba diving? Scuba diving is brilliant. It's the most fun thing that you can do, I think, in the whole world.

Now, I've been scuba diving and I realized I'm down there looking at this abundant life. Incredible color. All this stuff that God created.

[ 30 : 23 ] That, up until maybe a century ago, no human eye ever saw. It's an astonishing thought. All this stuff that the lavish God made that is, in a sense, redundant and beautiful.

And that represents the character of our God and we are to do the same to his creation. The second passage on the right-hand side of this slide, it's a wee bit small to see, is Hebrews 2, which speaks then of Jesus as the one who fulfills it.

He is the one who is in charge now. Everything is under his feet. And then those who are in Christ share in his restored dominion over the whole of creation.

Now, this is all very well, isn't it? If this is the way things began, if this is what God did in the beginning, well, in one sense you could say, so what? Is this just nostalgia?

We look back and we say, well, once it was nice, but now you walk out in the street there and it's full of rubbish and you don't have to go too far, open your newspapers or log on to the news website or whatever it is, and you realize that something's gone wrong.

[ 31 : 43 ] Is this story, this account of creation just to fuel nostalgia? I wish it were still like this. Well, that's why I had us read Revelation 21 as well.

Because the biblical big picture isn't just about a creation that's kind of long lost, that we feel the loss of because things are now not the way they're supposed to be.

But it's actually about a destination of this story, where it's finally going towards. And the crucial thing to notice in that account in the new creation is it's a new heaven and a new earth.

Not new as in everything is trashed and got rid of, but new as in renewed and restored. The pattern is resurrection.

Just like Jesus' resurrection body is recognizably Jesus. In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, we see the lamb who was slain. The scars are still there.

[ 32 : 45 ] He is still incarnate. One who is incarnate is ruling the universe right now. There's a continuity with the old creation, if you like.

He's recognizable, but importantly, there's a difference as well. The Revelation passage teaches us that in important ways, there is continuity between now and what is to come.

There's important discontinuity. There's no more death or dying or sorrow or tears or pain. It's a restoration of things to the way that they're supposed to be.

It's wonderful good news. And insofar as we've just said that everything we do because God's created it is important and matters. Because there's continuity.

Because there's continuity. And if we read on through Revelation 21, we'd see the kings of the nations bringing their glories into this new Jerusalem. Quite what that looks like, I don't know.

[ 33 : 46 ] But imagine that somehow nothing good is wasted or lost. So not only because of creation does everything we do matter.

But because of the new creation, everything we do matters and has eternal significance. So we're beginning to be able to answer the questions, who am I and what am I for?

Jesus' incarnation and resurrection, of course, are a further endorsement of this key point. That creation is good. Physicality is good.

Creatureliness is good. Do we think of our bodies as being good? Because if we think of salvation as being somehow being an escape from our bodies, an escape from physicality, that's a Gnostic idea.

That's not a Christian idea. That's not a biblical spirituality. It's quite, quite wrong. We look forward to a restoration of this stuff.

[ 35 : 03 ] And that's great good news. My son, Sandy, suffers terribly from back pain from failed back surgery when he's in his teens. And I was having a particularly bad day at one point and was probably letting it get on top of me.

And my perspective perhaps wasn't quite right. And he said to me, but Dad, it'll be so much better when you're dead. To which you have to say, well, for whom?

But he lives with pain that makes him long for that restoration. And he was kind of rebuking me and saying, Dad, come on, get a perspective. This is where it's going.

And that's wonderful good news. I'll finish this with a couple of questions. So what? When we understand that God has created us in the way he has created us, that's the basis for thinking about every human person as having inherent dignity.

Regardless of what they can do for you, every human person created as image bearers has dignity. That's why murder is such a serious, serious sin.

[ 36 : 17 ] The taking of life is a very, very serious thing. Looking after and protecting people becomes hugely important because we're made in the image.

And actually, this is the basis for Western cultures, up till now at least, general acceptance of the fact that human beings are important and worthwhile and not just expendable resources.

We're made with a purpose. We're actually created with purpose as image bearers to reflect the character of God to his creation according to the ways that he's made us with our different gifts and personalities and backgrounds and opportunities.

But everybody made for a purpose. We'll see more about that, I think, tomorrow. We have a unique place and task and relationship in this creation.

And this means there is no divide between the things that matter to God and the things that don't matter to God. It's all his. And we reflect his character to all of it. This is where we'll finish then.

[ 37 : 25 ] Kind of almost on time. That's... Ish. Not bad. Complete the sentence then. Filmed not far from here, up in Arthur's seat, was that scene from Charnet to Fire.

I'm sure you're familiar with it, are you? Where we see the fictional Eric Little in this particular scene saying, God made me fast and when I run, I feel his pleasure.

What is it God created you? How is it he made you that when you are doing that, you feel his pleasure? I once asked this of a very dear friend of mine. And he thought about it for a second soon.

He said, you know, God made me pedantic and when I'm critical, I feel his pleasure, he said. Which is about right for him. But complete the sentence.

If God created you, in his image, likeness, and for a purpose, then what? And not just you individually, but us corporately.

[ 38 : 25 ] Think about some of the things that follow from that as you're reflecting. If God created me, then he has a purpose. If God created me, I'm not an accident.

I'm not a blot on his creation. I might actually matter. He might want something to do with me because he created me. There's a whole bunch of ways you can complete that particular question.

And we'll stop there. And I'll pray. And then, is it top up with coffee time?

Yes. Lord, thank you. Lord, if there's words there that are from you that honor you, let them impact hearts and show us how to apply this.

Thank you that every endeavor matters. And Lord, thank you that you have appointed us over your creation as your representatives.

[ 39 : 32 ] Please enable each one of us to represent your goodness, your beauty, your holiness, your love, your generosity to each other during this coffee time together.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.