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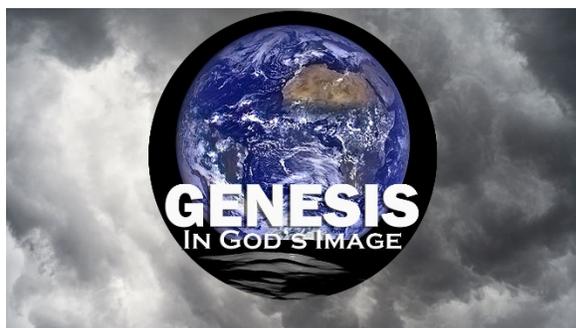
Title: Genesis: In God's Image

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Text: [Genesis 1:26-31](#)

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It seemed to me that a good way to start this new season in the church and the new year, albeit a week late, is to start at the beginning – as in “in the beginning” – and no, that’s not a reference to baseball - (you’ll get that about three o’clock this afternoon). But “in the beginning” as in the first words in all of scripture in the book of

Genesis. Genesis has so much foundation for understanding the rest of the Bible. I’ve selected four pieces of the book that we’ll consider over these four Sundays that remain in January. Today, we’ll look at the creation stories. Next week, we’ll look at Noah and the flood followed by the towering figures of Abraham and Joseph. There’s so much more than I can share in four 15-minute sermons so I invite you to work your way through Genesis this month. If you started reading today and read two chapters a day, you’d finish on the 2nd day of February.

Let’s take a look at the creation stories. That’s twice now that I’ve said stories - plural. If you take my advice and read chapters one and two of Genesis before the end of today, you’ll discover something that seems confusing at first but hopefully will begin to make some sense. When we think of creation, we normally think of Genesis, chapter one.

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then 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 Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.” (Genesis 1:1-5)

We like the chronology of it – it’s how we learned it. Day 1 – light and dark. Day 2 – the sky. Day 3 – Earth and seas and vegetation. Day 4 – sun, moon, stars. Day 5 – swarms of living creatures, birds, and great sea monsters (I want to talk to God about that one). Day 6 – creatures of every

kind, cattle, wild animals, everything that creeps upon the ground AND...us – humankind – male and female at the same time. Day 7 – God rests.

After verse four starts in the second chapter of Genesis, we get another creation story. The heading in my study Bible says, "*Another Account of Creation.*"¹ This account is different. There are no days or time periods mentioned. Man and woman are created separately with the animals in between. Animals are given names in the second one. In the second account, there are four speakers – man, woman, serpent, and God. Only God speaks in the first.

Most of us – me included – have treated these two accounts of creation like we treat Christmas or Easter. We take the different tellings of the story from different authors and mold it into one story and make it our own. Even though we like the days of creation from the first story, we're intrigued by woman being made from man's rib in the second story. We like the talking serpent tempting Eve even though it's only in the second account.

What then should we make of this and what are we to believe about creation? A really important thing to be aware of when reading any of God's Word is that the Bible contains many different forms of writing. There is history, like in the Book of Acts, like the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert and much of the book of Genesis is history. In fact, a whole lot of the Bible is history. And it reads like history.

But then you also have books like Proverbs, which is decidedly not written like history, but instead is a series of sayings. There is no historical information at all in Proverbs. And then you have the Song of Songs, which is written in a poetic, song-like style, or the book of Psalms, which is a literal songbook.

What happens if you read history in the same way you read the lyrics to a song? You get confused. You might get a bit annoyed, because, for instance, one of the things about songs and poetry is that there's a fair bit of repetition. The choir just sang "All Things Bright and Beautiful" by John Rutter. By my count, they repeated –

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

...four times. You would never find an encyclopedia written like that, you would never write an essay like that unless you're just trying to up your

word count because it would not work. Song lyrics, poetry is one thing. History is another. When you're reading the Bible, you need to be aware of what you're reading, so that you understand it as it's meant to be understood. Most times the variance is from one book to another but occasionally it changes from chapter to chapter or even verse to verse in the same book. That's what happens between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

Genesis chapter 1 is a song. Some people look in detail at chapter 1 and then chapter 2 of Genesis and say: Hey, these are 2 different accounts of creation, and they contradict each other. You can only say that when you don't understand that Genesis chapter 1 is a song, and that chapter 2 is history. Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a poetic text. It is metered, and probably the writers intended for it to be sung as a hymnic chant. Rhyme is not all that important in Hebrew poetry, but Hebrew poems commonly use repetition, and other artistic devices common to that genre. ²

In Genesis 1 there is the repetition like: "And God said . . ." and each section ends with: "And there was evening, and there was morning--the . . . day." Likewise, after the first two days, we have the artistic repetition of the phrase "And God saw that it was good," leading up to a final crescendo, "and it was very good" in Genesis 1:31. This structure is high poetry in the best Hebrew style.

Genesis 2:4-3:23 is a non-poetic text. It is written in prose rather than in poetic lines--no meter. The narrative voice tells us that humanity is called "adam" because God made him from "adamah" - ground or dust. There is history and explanation of history here. Most scholars today believe that at least three different traditions contributed to what we have compiled in Genesis.

What I want you to hear today – beyond "is it history – is it poetry and why does it matter" is something much more relevant to us even as we gather early in this new year. It comes packaged in one verse. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." (Genesis 1:27).

The image of God is a foundational concept for understanding our significance and purpose. Understanding how we are made in God's image helps us to see the basis for the dignity and purpose of our life and work. Our worth is connected to our Creator. And not just our worth but the worth of every person on this planet. If God is of great and undefinable worth, then human beings made in his image must be of great value, too.

If we believe and honor this passage from Genesis 1, then there are implications of that belief. We either believe that EVERYONE was made in God's image or NO ONE was made in God's image. We don't get to choose. I will err on the side of everyone. The implications of such a belief are these.

1. There are no ordinary people. C.S. Lewis said this in his book, *The Weight of Glory*: "There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal."³ It's true you know? The people you see every day, even the ones to whom you give little regard, are ones created in God's image. Even the most obscure person is not ordinary in God's eyes. In light of this truth, we must wrestle with how we affirm the dignity of the people around us?

2. Sin found us early and finds us often. Sin indeed finds Adam and Eve in the garden in that second account of creation. You'll read about it tomorrow when you get to Genesis 3. They discover sin and there are ramifications of that sin but here's what else happens that you hardly ever hear about. "And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and his wife, and he clothed them." (Genesis 3:21). God made them their first set of clothes. Adam and Eve, naked before God, receive grace in the form of clothes. It is right to take time for self-examination, confession, and repentance. But we eventually come back to God's grace and our dignity stemming from being made in the image of God. The third implication of being made in the image of God is this.

3. The restored image of God looks like Christ. While the image of God is marred and defaced, we are reminded that we also look like Christ. Romans 8:29 reminds us that we are being "conformed to the image of his Son." Jesus is the perfect representative of the image of God, and we are being made like him.

Being made in the image of God provides the basis for our work and vocation. If we are made in the image of God, we share God's characteristics. Because God is creative, we can be creative in our work and are called to such creativity. Knowing the basis for our dignity and worth helps us believe that we have gifts and talents to employ. I know people who haven't discovered their calling because they don't believe they have anything to offer. They don't believe they have dignity and worth and fail to recognize their God-given gifts as a result.

Think about it as you think of a hundred-dollar bill. I don't have much experience with hundred-dollar bills but I know they exist. The value of a US hundred-dollar bill is NOT based on where it has been or how it has been used. Its value is NOT determined by its shape, size, or color. A one-dollar bill in US currency has the same shape, size, and color as a hundred-dollar

bill. If you want to know what the bill is worth, what matters is whose image is on it. George Washington's image tells us that it is a one-dollar bill we are holding – I have more experience with those. If we have a bill with the image of Benjamin Franklin, then we know we are holding a hundred-dollar bill.⁴

How do you determine what you are worth? You need to know whose image you bear. How much is a crisp, clean hundred-dollar bill worth? A hundred dollars. How much is a dirty, crumpled, hundred-dollar bill worth? A hundred dollars. Why? Your worth is not based on where you've been or how crumpled your life has been or your shape or size or color. Your worth is based on the image of the one in whom you were created. And that is good news.

¹ The New Interpreters Study Bible, Abingdon Press. page 9.

² I was greatly helped in my exegesis of Genesis 1 and 2 by the work of L. Kip Wheeler in an article, "What are the J, P and E Texts of Genesis" found here - http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/genesis_texts.html

³ Lewis, C.S., *The Weight of Glory*, HarperOne Press, March, 2001.

⁴ Illustration from Tom Hughes, *Down to Earth: How Jesus' Stories Can Change Your Everyday Life*, NavPress, 2019, p.5, 10.