

**SERMON TITLE-** "In The Image of God He Created Them"

**TEXT-** Genesis 2

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

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We are in a series of sermons designed to lay down a context for tackling life. We are doing this through a study of Genesis.

Last week we looked at Genesis 1. Any study that claims to take on as big an assignment as a context for life is pretty hard to boil down into simplistic statements- but Genesis 1 has themes that cannot and must not be misunderstood. So far we have seen several unmistakable background items.

**-God created everything in the entire cosmos.**

**-This creation is very good.**

**-God stands beyond creation and alone is to be worshipped.**

Why is this context important? Because these statements must not be assumed. Each has a counterpart that many people hold and what you really believe in these contexts will work its way out in your life. In fact people are justified in looking at our lives and challenging things we say and do that contradict these claims.

Today we move on to the next grand context statement in Genesis-

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26-27**

**We Are Created In God's Image**

**We Are Special- Every Person Is Special**

Those who have lived under the assumptions of Genesis can fail to understand how challenging and profound the context that it provides, are.

Those who live under them can say, "Of course God created everything. So what?" It is only when we look at the alternative- the assumption that we are the products of random chance that we see the difference. If we are just accidents of the universe the deep despair has no bottom. Nothing really matters.

We have gone through a challenging season in the past year. It has tapped our energy and at times has threatened to run us dry. That is sometimes how life goes and sometimes we do hit bottoms much harder than we want to.

However under all this lays a foundation that says, "God created everything and we don't live in a meaningless universe. We serve the Creator of everything."

Today we look at the next level of context that Genesis lays out for God's people.

Not only is the universe created by God- within that creation humanity is special.

This theme is celebrated through out Scriptures. One of the beautiful restatements of it is in Psalm 8-

**O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens . . . When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? Psalm 8:1-4**

**You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Psalm 8:5-9**

Socrates said that, "an unexamined life is not worth living." I think there is a lot of philosopher's arrogance in that- but at one level it is a very Biblical thought. To really appreciate life and to know the treasures God offers His people- requires "examination." It requires us to be willing to step back and look at the BIG picture and be amazed.

How will we ever understand one of the most important contexts of all Scripture if we don't have a sense of amazement at the incredible universe in which we live.

And what is that context? In this astonishing cosmos human beings are special- that means individual human beings- that means specifically you and me and the people that we rub shoulders with as we go through life. This is a very practical claim.

Why is this a remarkable "context" statement? because it is the opposite of 2 opposite the messages that we are bombarded with every day of our lives and this has continued from the beginning of history until now.

**"Opposite" #1- You And I Are VERY Important**

The first opposite comes from the fact that there are 6.7 billion people on earth and I am just one of them- insignificant by any measure. Long before there were 6.7B people on earth the average person understood their insignificance. Unless you happened to be the ruler of nation you were constantly reminded how brutish and disposable you life was. What did the life or death of a single person matter to the king? Frankly- nothing.

Even if you happened to be a king, however, your insignificance was real. In fact if you were a king- your chance of dying peacefully we even lower than the average people.

And so it is that the Biblical statement that you and I, as individual human beings are special- is remarkable- to say the least.

And why is this such a remarkable insight? Is it only something that a philosopher or scientist who sees the grand scheme of the whole universe can grasp?

Hardly! It is an insight that everyone who has ever felt that life was rolling over them like a freight train can take comfort in when they understand it. We are not just a bug on the windshield of life.

We are important. In fact to say that every human life is infinitely important is probably not an overstatement. Jesus makes the point in this famous passage-

**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31**

“Getting” this is a huge revelation- and should be the product of a “considered” life understood in the context of Genesis.

### **“Opposite” #2- You And I Are Not More Important Than “Them”**

The second “opposite” comes from the opposite angle. Along side of the reality that you and I are individually special is an instinct that we have within us- it is that I am more important than anyone or anything else in the universe.

It is a paradox of life that when we are overwhelmed we think of ourselves as insignificant- but when things are going well we think of ourselves as being the most important creatures imaginable.

This of course, is as big a problem as the first. This is the source of self-centered greed and all that follows from it. It suggests to us that we are extremely important and the rest of humanity diminishes in importance. The rest of humanity diminishes to the point at which people regularly treat their pets with far less consideration than the people in their lives.

And how does Genesis challenge this notion? Guess what- EVERY human being is created in God’s image and is special. Every human being- no matter how insignificant we might feel they are is equally created in the image of God- with every other human being- especially including ourselves.

This too is a huge challenge to how we are naturally wired. It is also a huge challenge to a natural view of life.

The view that every human life is of infinite value, however, is to be the driving guide to how we live our lives. We are to care for people- and specifically not just those people who are close to us.

This is another of the principles that Jesus taught His followers. The outcasts of society of exactly equal importance in the Kingdom of God as the most important person in our society. Every human being is worth no more and no less than any other.

In most ancient societies the rules of the importance of the various people were clearly laid out. The ruler was the most important and those who burdened society or who were least important. If you have no value then you have no status and are expendable.

If on the other hand, you are a problem and consume more effort than you give back- then you are not merely expendable- you are a dead weight that must be removed. Pretty simple.

Most ancient societies set the rules for these principles out quite clearly and everyone from the top to the bottom understood them.

And so it was that when Jesus came to earth and acted according to the context set out in Genesis- everyone was shocked. Jesus associated with everyone- from tax collectors, to lepers, to prostitutes, to rulers, to the average person on the street. To actually live by this principle was so shocking that everyone immediately took note.

As Jesus’ followers- His actions are specifically to be reflected in our behaviour.

**My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. James 2:1**

It is pretty simple and easy to understand. But as easy as it is to understand it is hard to live by. We are hard wired to show favoritism.

But the implication of the principle that everyone is created in God’s image has another twist to it. Not only are those who understand Genesis to treat every person as valuable- we are actually to be defenders and advocates for those that the rest of society has discarded.

This, of course is a massive challenge in a world of 6.7B people among whom possibly 1/3 struggle to meet the daily requirements for basic life. It is a challenge as we walk the streets of our cities and see those begging by the side of the road.

It is a challenge when we go to the jail and see people behind bars because somehow things don’t work for them outside.

It is a challenge when we see families close to us struggling with their internal relationships.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate how God wants us to treat those who fall on hard times and while we can all applaud the Good Samaritan- there are times when it looks the entire street is covered with casualties.

Scripture is very clear that not one of us is the solution to the disasters that surround us- BUT it is just as clear that we are not permitted to withdraw into our fortresses and only look after “us.”

To say that this is revolutionary hardly does justice to the impact that understanding this should have in our lives. We are a special creation, placed in a VERY good creation.

And being this special creation- made in the very image of God leads directly to the next hugely important context statement that begins in Gen 1 and is spelled out in the next chapter-

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 1:26 & 2:15**

### **We Have Been Given Work To Do**

We have been put on earth to work. This is another of the revolutionary context pieces the spring for the early chapters of Genesis.

Work is not only not evil- work is good. A few years ago we did the Purpose Driven series as a church. It was a great series and laid down wonderful Kingdom principles. An elementary principle within that series and it is even contained in the very title- is the premise that we are put on earth to work.

Now there are several things that make this premise revolutionary-

1. Work is not something to be avoided. Reality is- most human beings associate work with tedium. The commercials on TV tell the story pretty well. The perfect life is lived in golf courses, beaches, theme parks, hotels and restaurants. The goal of life- if the commercials are to be believed- is to retire as soon as possible in as much luxury as possible.

And so when those who read the Bible say things like- “God put us on earth to work” a very natural reaction is- “I don’t like work- that doesn’t fit into me game plan.”

2. We were not put here in order to achieve some kind of inner nirvana. From the earliest recorded history until today a common conception of spirituality was that the highest form of existence is sitting on a mountain-top, experiencing the presence of God. And so since the beginning of time society has given people who seem to embody such a pursuit the places of status.

This is not a Biblical model. People were created and immediately put to work.

### **Understanding Why Work Is Good**

As we go through Genesis, specifically beginning in Chapter 3 we will see that in the beautiful, good creation God made- things quickly went terribly wrong. This is a very important part of the context we are given.

I bring that forward today because when Genesis describes how and why things went wrong- the order in which it is described, matters.

Specifically it is important to note that work was created before things went wrong. Work was not- as some people think- a punishment inflicted on humanity. Work is not a curse- it is what we are designed to be part of. And this is not just “fun” work.

### **Why Does This Context Make A Difference?**

#1. It should reflect in our attitude to the work that is before us. I spent some time both as a worker in a steel mill and later as a shift foreman. Once you are a foreman you quickly spot the lazy people with bad attitudes to the job.

Those who get their context for life from the Bible should never be accused of having being lazy or having a bad attitude to work. For us work is a gift from God.

#2. The Church is a working operation.

As important as point 1 is- it is a mere reflection of something far more basic to the people of the Kingdom.

Those who have undertaken to be follower of Jesus join a community that is a working operation.

This of course is a very big picture and needs more than a closing point in a sermon- but it is there in Genesis 1 & 2 nonetheless- and thus needs to be noted well.

And noting it means at least one explanation is needed. Work in the Kingdom of God includes each and every member without fail. There are very visible aspects of the work. There are completely invisible aspects of the work.

There are aspects of the work that are 90% physical and other aspects that are 90% mental.

Each and every member of the Kingdom of God has an assignment given to them by God Himself, just as Adam and Eve has assignments given to them when the were placed in the Garden.

Genesis lays out the background for you and me- special creations created in the image of God Himself- given tasks to do within His beautiful cosmos.