

(Genesis #2) Man in God's Estimate

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the message of Genesis, which reveals that God created man in his own image and gave him the dignity and purpose of being Lord of the whole creation under his maker.

Duration: 45:29

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-27, Genesis 1:31 - 2:15, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Sinfulness Of Man"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the amazing dignity of man, who bears the image of God. The speaker highlights that many people feel dissatisfied and lost because they do not understand their purpose in God's plan. The sermon focuses on two main points about man: that he is the crown of all God's creatures and that he was meant to be a ruler for God, manifesting His glory. The speaker also discusses the setting and preparation of man, emphasizing the importance of a day of rest and the provision of a helper fit for him.

Transcript

I don't know whether I'm right or not, but I feel the congregation would like to go on singing tonight. Well, that's a good sign. Now, my text tonight is too long to read.

That's a bad sign. But I want to bring you a message tonight which is based upon largely the first two chapters in the book of Genesis, but don't get excited. Obviously, we're not going to take it in detail.

I think it must be agreed on all hands that we have been very largely influenced as Christian people by the critical approach to the book of Genesis. We're all aware of various modes of criticism that have been leveled either against the message of the book or against the way the book has been compiled. And I think it is true to say that almost all of us have suffered almost incalculable loss because of the way we have reacted to such criticism.

Now, one loss, I believe, is this. I believe that there are very few people who have really got the message of the book of Genesis at this point. Now, I base what I'm saying on periods I have spent in conference with pastors and with students, theological students and others.

And it has been made perfectly clear that whereas many of them have been aware of what science says or what philosophers say or what anthropologists say or whatever you may have at the time, they're not aware of the message of the book itself. In other words, we have become occasionally so obsessed with an attempt to answer criticism at this point or that that we've really not sat down and done our homework. And we are unaware of what the word of God at a given point really tells us.

Now, one is not unaware of these various criticisms that have been leveled from time to time. But tonight I'm going to speak as if there was no criticism at all. I'm going to bury my head right under the sand.

And I'm going to close my eyes and close my ears to every criticism from any source. Because what I want to do is this. I want to ask a question.

I want to come to this passage in the book of Genesis and I want to pose the question, what are you saying to us, accepting for the moment at any rate the integrity of the book, the divine authority of the message here? This is the question. What is the message of Genesis 1 and 2? I believe it is fundamentally one message. There are many parts to it.

But I want us to listen in tonight for a moment and see if we can hear it. It is only in so far, it seems to me, in so far as we really get this message that we have got the vital word to declare to our fellow men at this time. If we don't understand what God meant man to be, we shall never be able to tell man what he ought to be.

And you know as well as I do that men are floundering all around us tonight because they feel that they are like square pegs in round holes. They try this, they run after that, they go after this ism and this latest kick or whatever it is, or this philosophy or that religion. And so often it all comes to nothing.

There is an aching void and a dissatisfaction. Fundamentally it is because of this. First of all, we do not know what man was meant to be in the will and in the purpose of God.

Or, if we know what man was meant to be, we don't know how to bring him back there that he is not there originally in the first place. I believe, therefore, that these two chapters have a message to tell us. And I want to turn to them and present you with a kind of outline, a composite picture, but in outline.

And I trust that God will bless it not only to our understanding, but that it will elicit faith in the God who is here revealed. Now, the first thing I would like us to notice is this, the setting which God prepared for man. As I understand it, the first fundamental thing that the book of Genesis tells us following the original statement about God's creation is this, that everything that proceeds from the first five creative days in Genesis is preparatory.

It is God preparing the stage for the main character, the main actor in the affairs of life, namely for man. Now, we have said this in other contexts and at other times, but I want to say it again tonight. God is a great stage manager.

He always prepares the stage for what is about to take place, and he does it well. That is what I believe we have here. The author of the book of Genesis in chapters one and two is showing how God prepared the stage because someone of the profoundest order and significance is about to move on to the stage.

Everything that is done, therefore, is preparatory for the oncoming of man. Now, this preparation is seen in two ways. First of all, there is a general preparation, and then there is a particular preparation.

The general you will find in verses one to twenty-five in chapter one. Now, each act of God recorded here is important, I believe, in its own right. Its real and ultimate importance lies, however, in the fact that it is part of the blueprint, part of the general blueprint, which describes God's preparation of the world for the coming of man.

And if we miss that, we miss everything. The first five days are preparatory for that which is to take place on the last of the creative days, on day number six. That which is to take place on day six, as man comes into being and he steps onto the stage, everything else is leading up to this.

God preparing the stage, and what a stage it is. But now, as well as the general preparation, there is a particular, a local preparation, and that you have in chapter two, verses eight to fifteen. Against the background of the general and complex activity of chapter one, resulting in the emergence of light in verse three, the firmament in the midst of the waters, verse six, the heavenly bodies, verses fourteen and fifteen, the creaturely inhabitants of the waters, of the birds of the air, the cattle and the creeping things, verses twenty and twenty-four, we must not fail to see that there is a more intimate and a local preparation that takes place in verses eight to fifteen of chapter two.

Now, what is this? Put in a nutshell, it is this. The man whom God is going to bring onto this scene of time is not simply being put into a world that has been divinely prepared, but into a garden that has been divinely planted. Now, let us get the message of this.

God not only prepares for man in a general sense, but he prepares for him in a particular sense. And I think that the writer of the book of Genesis, or rather, let me put it like this, I believe that God, in inspiring the writing of this letter, wants us to get the message. God is not simply concerned about the general issues of our lives.

He is concerned about that. He is concerned about the air. He is concerned about the sky.

He is concerned about all the universe around us, everything around us. But there is a local setting where he has placed us, and he is especially concerned about that. He put man in a garden.

God planted a garden. Now, you will read here that God is a great homemaker, and my, don't we need him in the level of home life. There is no homemaker like our God.

Now, will you notice that the kind of thing that God thought about for man's home, man's garden, I can only refer to them, but I want you to look at verse 9 in chapter 2. Now to the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight. Now, how easy it is to gloss over that. But you see what it means.

God is concerned that man's environment should be one of beauty. Did you ever thought of that? God was concerned that man's environment should be one of beauty, something to look at, something magnificent, something beautiful. God wanted him to have a home like that.

Turn again. I read in verse 9, and every tree that was good for food and the tree of knowledge of good and evil God made. Now mark those words.

Every tree that was good for food God made. God didn't want his man, God didn't want his creature to live in an atmosphere of starvation, or where everything was bare or barren or a bleak wilderness. This was not God's purpose.

It was God's purpose that it should be a garden, and he put there not only trees for beauty but trees for fruit bearing. Every tree that was good for fruit he put there. He wanted man to have the best.

Let me add one other thing. A river flowed out of Eden, we read in verse 10, to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers, and the division is described in the verses that follow. The preparation for potential prosperity.

God meant man to prosper. God meant man to live in a garden that was flourishing, and he caused a river to flow into that garden and to flow out of it because the prosperity that he meant the garden to bring forth, he wanted the owners of the garden in due course to share with the population as it grew and as it emerged. What a beautiful picture.

A setting in which God would place his man. And it tells me in the first place that my God is a God that wants the best for his creature. And insofar as sin has damaged our universe and made it impracticable for the vast masses of men and women to enjoy a home like this, I say, my God is concerned.

He prepared a home like this for man. A setting which God prepared for man. Now the next thing is this, the dignity with which God endowed man.

Now here I'm at a loss for words. How can one describe it? How can you bring together some of these features described in these two chapters in order to show the amazing dignity of man himself? You don't prepare so lavishly for the emergence of a chimpanzee. What an anticlimax.

There is someone coming on to the scene of time who bears the very dignity of his own creator upon his character. And the lights are on. And the stage is set.

And the trumpets are sounding because man, bearing God's image, albeit made of the dust of the earth, is about to stand on the stage of time. The dignity of man. Now how do we see this? How do we get this message? Well now, can I put it to you in this way? It seems to me that these chapters are telling us two very important things, two main things about man.

Not much else, but two main things. These two chapters tell us that man is in the first place the crown of all God's creatures. He's the crown of everything.

When man was made, God has reached the summit of his creative purposes. Now we've already stressed his emergence as the climax of the creative process. First five days, everything else, preparatory for the sixth day when man was made.

That's what the book says. But we must now emphasize man's intrinsic glory and dignity, the way he was made in himself. Not just his setting, but himself, man himself.

Look at verses 26 and 27 in chapter 1. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Then later on, So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him.

Male and female he created them. Now this is something altogether different from what's gone on before. Though he was made of the dust of the ground, as we read in chapter 2 and verse 7, man was made after the image of God.

Now you notice what's happening here. Two elements are being brought together. The dust of the ground that has been made previously, and then the unseen image of the unseen God.

And God is the artificer. God is making man after his own image, so that he is elevating the dust of the earth to bear the image of the deity himself. Now in presenting such a general sketch as I'm trying to do tonight, we'll come back to some of these details again.

But in presenting a general picture like this, it's impossible to explain in any detail or to enlarge very much about the image of God, what it means. But let's say this. Fundamentally, it couldn't have been physical, because God is not a physical being.

God is incorporeal. God is spirit. And therefore the image of which the writer speaks here couldn't have been a physical thing.

The image may express itself in a man's way of looking, even in his facial expression. But fundamentally, it is not something in the flesh. It is not something in the body.

It is not something that we see with the physical eye. What is it then? Well, basically, it is spiritual, and it must refer to something of this order. Man, as distinct from all the other creatures, has self-consciousness.

He's aware of himself. He can say with the French philosopher Descartes, cogita ergo sum, I think, and therefore I am. I reason.

I know I'm here. And I'm capable of reasoning my situation. I know what I am.

I'm in a pulpit. I can touch this. I can see people in front of me.

Man has that kind of consciousness of himself, and of his environment, and of his setting. He can reason. Not only that, he has the capacity for reflection.

He can look back over the course of his life, and he can remember, he can bring things up with a long arm of his memory, and then he can reflect upon them, and he can put them in their place, and he can learn from them. And what is more, having learned from them, he can teach himself and teach other people how to live the better, how to profit from the past. Not only that, man, like God, makes a distinction between right and wrong.

Now, of course, there are times when this thing that we call conscience doesn't function properly in man, and we call wrong right, and right wrong. I'm not referring to the way it functions for the moment, but just to the fact that it is found in man. Men everywhere distinguish between certain things that they, according to their standards, say is right, and other things wrong.

In other words, man is a creature who makes moral distinctions. That's exactly what God does. God distinguishes between truth and error, between good and evil, between moral black and moral white, and man is made after his image in that respect.

Now, these are some of the distinguishing marks in the image of man. He's so different from the animals. He's so different from the highest and the most sophisticated animal, if we may so speak.

Man is the crown and the climax of the creatures. And so, later on in the book of Genesis, we see what a terrible thing it is for anyone to take man's life away. We are told that we can eat of other animals' flesh on certain conditions, but he that kills man, I read in Genesis 9, 6, is in a different category altogether.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. Why? For God made man in his own image. And that's the first thing.

Man, then, is the crown of God's entire creation. God made no creature beyond man. But now, the next thing.

God made man and chose him to be the caretaker of the universe. Two things I want to say about this. Let me read to you two verses again, verses 26 and 28.

God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion. Now, these are the relative words. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps over the earth.

Then, verse 28. Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over it. Now, will you please mark those words.

Have dominion over it. Rule over it. Subdue it.

Subjugate it. Be fruitful and multiply. Now, what's happening here? What's happening is this.

Take the message as it comes to us. Listen to the book of Genesis. And it is telling us that God made the whole business and he handed it over to man as his vice-regent or the caretaker of the universe.

Man is here given the mastery over nature. Here lies, of course, the divine mandate for scientific exploration and experimentation. Man is to rule the cosmos for his God.

Man is to subdue everything because he himself is subject to God. Then, given dominion over the whole, man is given special direction over the part. His garden whole.

Turn over to chapter 2 and verse 15, and this is what you're told. Or this is what we read. And the Lord God took the man and he put him into the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it.

God is going to entrust man with a task of being the caretaker of the entire universe and especially of a part of it. He's not going to till the whole. He's responsible for the whole, but here he has special responsibility.

Now mark what is happening. Man is given the dignity and the purpose of God of being Lord of the whole creation under his maker. He is the climax and the crown of creation.

He's the caretaker of the whole. And all this he is given by divine command. God meant him to have responsibility.

God meant him to be a worker. God meant him to be a man who was capable of doing these things. God meant him.

Such is the dignity that God gives to man. He bears his image and he exercises sovereignty or is called to do it in the name of the maker of all things. Now the next thing is this, the sufficiency with which God surrounded man.

Now again I'm not going into any of the critical stuff at all. We're burying our heads under the sand for the moment. These first two chapters of Genesis make an idyllic picture taken at their face value.

Eden has often been referred to as a paradise. Milton of course has popularized that imagery. So have others after him.

In the time at my disposal now I simply want to underscore some of the features which point to the bountiful goodness of God. All the good that God had in his heart, all the grace, all the goodness overflowing for man. First of all God provided him with all material needs, material plenty shall we say.

Now we've gone over that, we've referred to it. The general and the particular outside the garden and within the garden. But let's come to this.

God not only provided him with material plenty, he provided man with spiritual resources that were equally adequate. First of all, the entire creation was a sphere in which man could commune with his maker. From any place within that ordered universe man could call upon the name of God.

More than that, we read that from within his garden home or rather taking place within that garden home this man heard the voice of God in the garden and recognized it and was able to speak to him. Now this is not only a vague kind of mystical communion, this is communication. This is not just a sense of the deity listening to me somewhere.

This is communication. This is talking, this is language. God calling to man and man answering God.

Then, what is more, his garden home was a scene of spiritual probation before God. Man always needs a stimulus in the moral and the spiritual realms. If we're left to ourselves without a moral stimulus we generally go to seed.

God put man in the Garden of Eden and he says, now there are certain things for you to do and there is one thing for you not to do. Strange, isn't it, the caricatures that we have of the book of Genesis. It is as if God had told man not to do anything.

In other words, everything is prohibitive. You know, it's not that at all. There was work for him to do, there was toil, there was mastery, there was tilling, there was preparation, there was subduing of the soil and production.

There was one thing he was not to do. Just one. All the trees that were good for fruit, they were there in the garden.

There was one tree in the midst of the garden that he was not to approach. Now, forget about the details. Let's get the principle only.

All the trees that were good for food were there. He has access to them all. They're all at his disposal.

There is one. Just one. One solitary tree, says the Lord.

Don't touch that. That's not yours. It's out of bounds.

You see what he's doing? God is giving man a moral stimulus to prove his allegiance. Show your mettle. Now prove yourself as to whether you're a creature that is faithful and loyal to your Maker.

It was Thomas Akempi who said, No man doth safely rule but he that hath learned gladly to obey. How very well said. No man doth safely rule but he that hath learned gladly to obey.

God is making a ruler here. But he cannot rule until he has learned to obey. His life was therefore so arranged that there was no necessity upon him whatsoever to have anything at all to do with the fruit of that one forbidden tree.

He has everything that he needs and access to all. And then this. The entire creation in which to commune with God.

This moral stimulus to work and to keep himself loyal to God. And then lastly, there was a Sabbath rest. God rested the seventh day and hallowed it.

He put a fence around it as it were and he said, Now, I've worked for six days but on the seventh day, no. What's the meaning of this? Well, the meaning of it is this, of course. Jesus says the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

It was made for man's purpose, for man's well-being. In what sense? I'm afraid we've just, we've just either never known or forgotten the meaning of the Sabbath day. On the other six days of the week, man, God's creature, if he's acting as God's creature at all, will think of God and worship God in all things.

And he will serve Him. But the purpose of the Sabbath day is this, that to the exclusion of all else legitimate and illegitimate, man gives himself to his Maker. Man waits upon God.

Man lives in the conscious presence of God undistractedly. And you and I know what it is to be involved with our duties from day to day. And thank God we can be witnesses and we can be loyal to Him in our offices, in our schools, wherever we are.

But we all know that there are times when our minds have to be hurly upon our work. Now, God meant His creature to become lost with Himself, as it were, one day in seven. What for? Because He wants this creature to be a ruler for Him.

Not a pygmy of a man, but a ruler, a giant, worthy of the name, bearing the image, manifesting the glory of His Creator. And in order to get there and to prepare Him and equip Him and keep Him there, God says, You need this. You need this.

And I give it to you. A moral stimulus to keep yourself from me. And then this whole one day in seven, materially endowed, spiritually endowed, and socially.

God provided man socially with a helper fit for him. Beautiful as that early paradise was, full and adequate of material things and spiritual possibilities and provisions, there was one thing lacking until this point. Now, I want you to notice that it was God who saw that one thing was lacking.

Man's need of a partner and of the ensuing society that it would provide was divinely recognized. I read in verse 18 of chapter 2, Then the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.

Now, it's God that saw that. It's God that saw that. And it's God that said, I will make him a helper fit for him.

It isn't because there's a grumble in man's heart and he says, Oh, why have you put me thus and thus? It's God that saw it. How good He is. You see, He's concerned for the best for His creature.

That's the point. But then, man's need could not be supplied by any other creature. No other was found a helper meet for him or fit for him.

Now, in verses 19 and 20 of chapter 2, the wording is such that it suggests that God let man scan all the existing creatures and God asked Him to name them, to give them appropriate names. He brought all the creatures that had been made before man and He said, Now you give them a name and see what you think of them because names express evaluation, especially in biblical times, so that He could thereby prove whether in His own estimate He could find a partner from among the creatures. Now, this is the point.

And we miss it if we don't see that. All the creatures that God has made are arraigned before man and He looks at them and He examines them and He calls this one that, and so forth, gives them names. But He can't find a kinship with any of them.

He's bigger. He's greater. He's larger.

He's diviner, may I say. He acknowledges them all as the handiwork of His God and His own maker, but no helper meet for Him. So we read, There was no helper found for man, no helper meet for Him.

So what? Well, this is what we read in verses 19 and 20, So because of that, no animal, no creature was found a helper meet for man. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, brought them to man to see what He would call them, and whatsoever man called every living creature, that was its name. the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper meet.

Therefore, God says, I will make Him a helper meet for Him. I will make Him. This need God personally met.

And so we have this most intricate and delicate operation that is described in verses 21 and 22, whereby God made woman as part of man. He didn't belong to the creatures and the creatures didn't belong to Him. He needs somebody who can help Him, who's part of Him, who has kinship with Him.

That's the message of this book. He can't be in partnership with the creature that is beneath Him. God made Him one who belonged to Him, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh, and gave Him woman to be bound to Him, and they too shall be one flesh.

Now, I don't know what you make of this picture. Take a retrospective look. To me, it's a remarkable thing.

The setting God prepared for man. Generally, He prepared the whole universe for His man. Particularly, He planted a garden for man.

The dignity with which God endowed Him, the crown of all the creatures, bearing His image, the caretaker of all creation. May Lord, the sufficiency with which He surrounded Him, material plenty, or the possibility of plenty, spiritual adequacy, and social company. Now, my friends, that's the kind of God represented in the Bible.

It's a God who cares for man like that. It's a God who's made provisions so lavishly for His creature. But now, that's not the end of the story.

That's the God that we have in the Bible. Now, sin, we shall come to that next time we go to the book of Genesis, sin has attacked that whole purpose of God for man. And if you tell me tonight, as I try to preach from this pulpit, yes, well, it's all very well to paint a picture like that, but it's not true of me.

I don't live in a garden. I don't have a beautiful home. I don't have this, that, and the other that you've described in the picture there.

I want to tell you, you haven't got it because of sin. On every front, Satan and sin have marred and mauled the purpose of God. And it's the only thing that does this.

This is what sin does. It mutilates the whole. Sin makes man careless of the environment.

He can live in a garden and become bored with it. Such is man. Not only that, but sin makes man quite unaware of his dignity.

So that there are times when he allies himself more with a beast of a field and reptiles than with his co-equals. He uses his material plenty not for the purpose that God meant, but he misuses it and misapplies it. And though the river that flowed out from the Garden of Eden was meant to carry the surplus and share it with other people, man just does not do that.

But he hoards. And he makes himself a God around which everything revolves. And he can't live with his partner.

Sin marring the dignity of man. It spoils his spiritual provision. It spoils the whole understanding.

This is what sin does. And at some point or other in all our lives, sin takes away from this. But my last word is this.

The whole purpose of salvation is to undo the works of the devil and to make real what was originally purpose here by God. Jesus came into the world, says John in his first epistle, to undo the works of the devil. To untie the fatal knot.

To take away the sin of the world. To make man a beast. To make man a new creature.

And placing man as a new creature in the old world to give him the opportunity again of beginning to exercise authority for God. First of all over himself. Then over his home.

Then over his circumstances. And out into the outside world. Wherever he has authority.

To exercise authority. More and more to bring the kingdom and the rule of God into being right here and now in measure. Though ultimately only when the king himself returns in its full.

Don't you think of the picture? Will you take it tonight that the God of the Bible is a God who has never willed anything but the best for his creatures. And in so far as it is not so, it is the work of an enemy. God has allowed it.

He is not cornered. He has allowed it. And he has allowed it for his own glory in the last resort.

Because out of it all he will show that he can master even sin. Oh, our God is very daring. He allows a whole wretched thing to take place because ultimately he will tear the hideous things off by the roots.

And cast even Satan to the bottomless pit. And to spite Satan. Turn to the last book of the Bible.

You will find a city four square. And a river in the midst of it. And into it there enters nothing that is defiled or defiling.

For the Lamb is in the midst. And all they that dwell in it walk in garments of white. Washed in the blood.

For paradise lost is a paradise regained through Jesus Christ. My friend, where are you tonight? Do you recognize this God as your God? I wonder whether some of us have a slanted view of God. This is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he comes to you tonight and says to you, Look man, look woman. From the very beginning I purposed grace for you. In life, in all its glory and all its fullness, I did not mean you to be a slave either to yourself or your circumstances.

I meant you to be a prince or a princess. Not an idyllic dream, but this is exactly what it says. And he does.

If you are not found there tonight, then the way back is to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. And acknowledge your sin. And ask him to make anew that creation which is your life.

That the process of undoing the works of Satan may begin in you. And one day when he returns he will finish it. It will be a tremendous thing.

When he will present his people before the Father, just think of it, without spot. This is speaking morally or spiritually. Without spot or wrinkle.

You good people are afraid of wrinkles, aren't you? You know when you pass forty, you look in the mirror and you say, Oh my, I must hide these signs of old age and decay. Do you know when the Lord Jesus will present his people before the Father, they will not have a flaw or a wrinkle in them. Because the new creation will be in a new body.

Like unto his glorious body. It will all bear the mark and the image of his own perfection. Exactly what he meant originally.

Fulfill it. In and through his blessed Son. Make him your Savior then.

Yield to him and trust him and let him begin in you this work of undoing the works of darkness and evil and to begin to build the new Jerusalem in your heart. Now. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we have been looking at this remarkable picture from Scripture. We ask that its impact upon us may be what thou hast purposed. We sometimes think of the bits and the pieces, but we pray thee that this picture may follow us and that the lie that men have said about thyself will be countered by it.

That we may see that all the evil and the sin and the suffering and the sorrow of our lives, they were not meant. They were not in the plan. But they're there because we have listened to an alien voice and instead of being sovereigns in our own right by thy sovereign command, we have become sleds to an enemy.

O Lord, extricate us and redeem us and renew us. Take us like the clay into thine own hand. Make us clean even as thou dost make us anew.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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