

(Genesis) 5 - the Mystery of Man; or the Modern Crisis of Identity

by S. Lewis Johnson

The sermon explores the mystery of man, the crisis in anthropology, and the creation of man, highlighting the importance of understanding man's relationship to God.

Duration: 49:12

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, Psalm 139:14, Matthew 19:4, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Identity", "Identity in Christ", "Creation and Purpose"

Description

S. Lewis Johnson explores the profound mystery of man as presented in Genesis, emphasizing the modern crisis of identity and the confusion surrounding humanity's understanding of itself. He highlights that while man has made significant advancements in knowledge, he remains lost without a true understanding of his relationship with God. Johnson asserts that man is uniquely created in God's image, with a purpose that transcends mere existence, and that true identity is found in recognizing this divine connection. He warns against the pitfalls of secularism and theistic evolution, advocating for a biblical understanding of man's creation, fall, and redemption. Ultimately, he calls for a return to God to find clarity and purpose in life.

Transcript

This morning will you turn with me to the second chapter of the book of Genesis as we continue our studies in this first book of the Bible. And we're reading a very short portion from the word, verses four through seven, the account in the second chapter of the creation of man. Verse four of Genesis chapter two, this is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, and the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.

Incidentally, some of your versions may begin the fifth verse with the expression in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven. In the version that I am reading, it is part of the fourth verse. Then the fifth verse begins, now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground.

But a mist used to arise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being, or a living soul, literally. May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

The subject for today in the continuation of our exposition of the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, is the mystery of man, or the modern crisis of identity. The psalmist in the eighth psalm says, what is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him? What is man? The mystery of man, how perplexing, and yet how contemporary and important. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most important and one of the best known of contemporary theologians, said before he died, man has always been his most vexing problem.

And the sentiments expressed by Niebuhr some thirty-five years ago are certainly sentiments that are appropriate at the present time. Today, more than at any time, the question, what is man, is at the center of theological and philosophical concern, said E.C. Burkauer, who until recently was professor of dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam in Holland. One thing that seems rather striking to us is that it appears in our twentieth century that man apparently, only apparently of course, can ignore God, but it is impossible for him to ignore man.

So he thinks constantly about man. He puzzles about man. He does not understand man.

He does not understand himself. The perplexity is seen in the variety of answers that have been given to the question, what is man? Some of them are, man is that nature able to will. Man is that animated being that experiences.

Man is depraved animal. I think we're getting closer there. Man is suppressor of instinct.

Man is thinking animal. Incidentally, yesterday I pulled out one of the books of quotations that I have. I should have done this a week or two ago, but I did it yesterday and just looked up some of the things that had been said about man as brief definitions, and particularly those that were connected with animal.

Depraved animal. Religious animal. Man is political animal.

Man is a tool-making animal. Man is noble animal. It's rather interesting how many of the definitions or descriptions of man use the term animal in recent years.

Man is thinking animal. Man is that creature that bores himself. Why should man be a problem? Of all of the things over which we puzzle, it would seem that man should be the one that we should never puzzle over.

Because man is what we are. We are men. All of us are men.

And consequently, the one thing that we should understand is what we are. If there is one thing that we know, it should be man. Especially when we think of the remarkable advances in knowledge in so many areas that man has made in the twentieth century.

Just think of the fantastic accretion of knowledge that is ours by means of our machines. We have these great machines by which we can do so many things that we could never have even dreamed of doing just a score or so of years ago. We have giant computers.

We have so many computers with software and hardware. And this week I was visiting with someone in the computer business and firmware. Never heard of that.

And probably more things we shall see. We are looking forward to the day when the computers do everything for us and we can spend our time on the golf course or something like that. But it's

unfortunately along with this now we have these appalling pictures of the computers running everything and us also.

And that's something to terrify you. But we have all of these magnificent inventions. Computers, transistors, lasers.

We have molecular biology, the discovery of DNA, the master molecule of life and boasts of being made that man shall be able to control the process of evolution. Knowledge pills will give every one of us our heart's desire. Theological students will no longer have to learn Greek and Hebrew.

They'll know it by means of the pill that they take. And by genetic surgery we shall be able to eliminate all of those inherited imperfections that belong to us. But the striking thing is that man is not master of himself.

He's really a slave. And the ancient imperative at Delphi, know thyself, is a mocking, shattering, distant, unattained mirage. We seem to know everything but man.

Niebuhr also said, and I think he's close to being right, it's not unfair to affirm that modern culture, that is our culture since the Renaissance, is to be credited with the greatest advances in the understanding of nature and with the greatest confusion in the understanding of man. There is then a crisis in anthropology, or the study of man. It's part, however, of a deeper problem.

And the deeper problem is the crisis in theology, the understanding of God. Modern man, practically echoing Nietzsche's claim that there is no God, has turned to religious secularism. And as a result of this he is wandering around, drifting away and about in his own thoughts about himself, seeking to find some kind of security in his doctrine of human sufficiency.

In biblical terms, the Bible has one word to describe man, he's lost. He does not understand himself, he does not understand God, he does not understand exactly where he stands in the program of God, and so consequently he's lost. Mark Twain said, there are times when one would like to hang the whole human race and finish the farce.

Well I think he would have echoed that with a great deal more emphasis today. Fortunately we do have a light in the midst of the darkness, and the light is the light of the divine revelation in the Word of God. Now we're going to turn this morning to Genesis chapter 2 and concentrate our attention upon the seventh verse.

But before we look at that verse I want to briefly make a few comments concerning verses 4, 5, and 6. Now we'll remember in our studies that we have seen in the first chapter the creation of the heavens and the earth, and then the creation of man, and finally in the third verse we read about the Sabbath day. Someone has said God has first created the universe and he rested, then God created man and rested, he finally created woman, and since then neither God nor man has rested. Now I didn't say that, someone else said it.

It was really mean and nasty of him to say that, and I thought I would say that so you could attack him. Now the caption over the section is found in the fourth verse. Then, for this is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.

Unfortunately when we turn to Genesis chapter 2, every inch of this chapter is a kind of a battleground. It's like the first chapter. These first two chapters of the book of Genesis have been discussed and debated over the centuries because so much depends upon them.

If it is true that God has created man as we read here, then of course we have a different outlook upon life. But if it is true on the other hand that there was an ancient explosion many millions of years ago, and out of this through the processes of evolution we have these sinking political religious animals, then of course we look upon ourselves quite differently. Liberals have often thought to discredit Genesis by saying that in the first chapter we have one account of creation, and then in the second chapter we have another account of creation.

For example they have said, you will notice that in the first account in Genesis chapter 1 through chapter 2 verse 3, we have the name for God Elohim used. But when we come to the second account, beginning with the fourth verse of the second chapter, we read in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven. In the fifth verse, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth.

The seventh verse, then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground. The use of a different name for God is suggestive to them of different accounts of the creation. In addition in the first account in chapter 1 we have the plants created on the third day, but here we have the plants mentioned after the creation of man.

We read in the ninth verse of the second chapter, and out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight of God for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So the combination of a different order of things, plus the different names for God is suggested that we have two different accounts of creation, and they are really contradictory. Now I do not think that that is true, and in a moment we'll say something about one of the aspects of that which suggests to me that they are not two different accounts.

What I would like to suggest to you at this point is that in Genesis chapter 1 we have account of creation, and in Genesis chapter 2 we have the beginning of the history of the creation that, concerning whose account of the creation we have in the first chapter. In other words, in Genesis chapter 1 we have the creation, and now we are dealing with the history of that creation that God created, and so he begins with man in this. In the first account in Genesis chapter 1 we have man as the climax of the creation, but here he is the pivot around which the history of that creation is developed.

In one we have the fact of man's creation stress, but here we have the process. Because one might ask, after reading God created man in his own image in the first chapter, we might ask, well, what processes were involved in the creation of man? And so in the second chapter, in the seventh verse, we have some light upon the process of the creation. So in Genesis chapter 2 then, we have a new beginning for a new purpose, but we do not have two contradictory accounts of creation.

We have the same creation, but it is looked at from a different standpoint. In the fifth verse, Moses writes, Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. I want to say just a word about the Lord God while here.

It's very fitting, it seems to me, for God to be called the Lord God here, for the word Lord is the word Yahweh that suggests the covenant-keeping God who acts in mercy toward men. Now I think that is very

fitting in the second chapter because this account moves toward the development of the covenant, and we shall talk about that next week when we discuss the probation of man in the Garden of Eden. So since the story moves toward the idea of covenant, it is natural for the covenant term to begin to appear, the Lord God, Jehovah, Elohim.

Then in addition, what about these plants? Is it really true that we have the plants created after man in the second account? I do not think so. It seems to me that these plants that are mentioned here are either those that are planted in the Garden of Eden specifically, that is the context of the verses that follow, or else they are those plants that require rain and human cultivation. Now anyone who has ever worked in a garden knows that there are two kinds of plants in your garden, those that don't need any care, that grow and grow and grow and continually grow.

They are the weeds that you have to contend with. Now you don't have to bother with them, they grow. But there are other types of plants that you plant in your garden that you must exercise care with.

You must tend to them, you must cultivate them. If you do not cultivate them, they will not grow. We also know from the standpoint of agriculture there are things that do not grow without cultivation, the grains for example.

And so it appears to me that when we read here of plants being planted now that man has been created, we have those plants that need human cultivation and care, and that do need rain. So consequently there is no contradiction between the two accounts. We are talking about something that is very true to life.

I sometimes think that perhaps if the critics were people who lived like most people do, rather than as professors in ivory towers, they might understand some of these things. And I think I have freedom to say something like that since I was a professor for thirty years. Now the state of the earth is described in the sixth verse.

But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. This is the deficiency. The Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth until there was need for this.

The original hydrologic cycle was quite different from today. Evidently at this point there was a vast watery scene with upsurging of mists or perhaps, as one of the Hebrew commentators has suggested, what we are reading about here is that river that is mentioned in the tenth verse. Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided and became four rivers.

But at any rate it had not yet rained because of the canopy, and the result was that the things that were growing were watered by these mists, or perhaps from the river which came from a spring in the creation. Now we turn to the seventh verse, and in the seventh verse we see the second deficiency is removed. We remember reading there in the first, the fifth verse, in the last clause, there was no man to cultivate the ground.

And so now we have man created. Thomas Mann, a German author that many of you no doubt know about and have read, has an essay called *In Praise of Mortality*. And in the midst of that essay he says, In the depths of my soul I cherish the firmament, that with those words let there be, which summoned the cosmos from the night, when life was generated out of inorganic beings, it was man who was foreseen.

Now when we read through the creation account we should not read through this account without realizing that everything up to this point is the background for the creation of man. All of this vast and mighty and

beautiful creation about us, beautiful even though it is under the curse at the present time, is designed to be the stage upon which the story of man is played out. In other words, the creation of the plants, the creation of the animals, the creation of the sun, the creation of the moon, is only an overture.

And the curtain does not really rise and the play begin until we read that the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being. What is then this man into whose nostrils the Lord God breathed the breath of life? What am I to think of myself? What is the role to which I have been assigned now that the curtain has risen and the play is to begin? You can define man in different ways of course. You can define man by his origin.

In that case man is a member of the animal kingdom. And of course men who do not understand the divine revelation or who reject the divine revelation frequently do define man in that way. Thinking animal, political animal, religious animal, noble animal, but still only an animal.

Now we can define man in other ways. We can define man by the tasks that he performs. In that case productivity is the thing by which he is defined.

He is the man who performs certain tasks. Just as God gave him the command to till the garden, keep it, fill the earth, subdue it. So if man is looked at only from the standpoint of his tasks he is productive being.

Or it's possible even for us to define man by the stars as some do, thinking that the stars determine our lives. There are people you know who are not happy until they have read their horoscope for the day. Now the stars are thought to have certain influences upon our life.

And if we define man in that way then we can say that man, well he is merely an organ that carries out the will of the cosmic powers of the universe. He is an astral being, that is a being influenced by the stars. Or we can define man by his relationship to God.

And that of course is how man is defined in the Bible. We read here, Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground. He does have that connection.

But he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. It is his connection with God that is the significant thing in the word of God. Previously he has said, let there be, let there be.

God said, let there be. But now he introduces the creation of man by saying, let us make man after our image, in our likeness. And in that way we can say, in a moment he will address man.

He will speak to man as a you. In other words, man is a person. Of this, with reference to this, it is said of no other of God's creation, not even the highest of the animals are you persons.

So it is the connection with God and his personality in which the definition of man should be constructed. Now we look at this verse and you'll notice that it is made up of three clauses. And these are three acts in the creation of man.

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground. The seventh verse, one of the commentators has said, with profound simplicity matches and completes the classic chapter one, verse twenty-seven, where we read God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him.

Male and female he created them. In the first reference in chapter one, verse twenty-seven, it was the nouns that were prominent. Image, likeness.

But here are the verbs. God breathed, God formed, God breathed, and man became a living soul. Now that raises the question of theistic evolution.

It is the contention of some and evangelicals at that, that while we do have creation taught in the Bible, creation is not contrary to theistic evolution. The doctrine of the theistic evolutionists is something like this. The God created the material out of which has arisen our world and out of which has come man.

Down through the years this material was overseen by God. The processes of evolution are processes which he has observed and guided and directed to the ultimate origin of man. So that man was originally dust or animal and after a long period of time this animal became a biped and then after a considerable period of time, sometimes millions of years, God breathed into this animal and man became an eternal soul or a living being.

Now this is not simply the view of liberals. This is the view of some conservatives. For example, Professor Edward John Carnell, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical institution, wrote a few years back, since orthodoxy has given up the literal day theory out of respect for geology, it would certainly forfeit no principle if it gave up the immediate creation theory out of respect for paleontology.

The two seem to be quite parallel. If God was pleased to breathe his image into a creature that had previously come from the dust, so be it, so Professor Carnell affirms. But now there are difficulties with this.

What shall we say about the passages of Holy Scripture that seem to teach a contrary view? For example, the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 19 and verse 4 that from the beginning God created them male and female. Now if it is true that at a point in time God breathed into a biped the breath of life and this became a living soul, a human being, would it not be true that male and female already was a feature of humanity? And yet the text of Scripture says in the beginning he created them male and female. That would seem to go contrary to the teaching of the Word.

Then in the second chapter we are given an account of the creation of the woman, and the account of the creation of the woman is contrary to theistic evolution. Eve was taken out of the side of Adam, so we are told. Furthermore, we read here that the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, not from an animal.

We read it is true that in chapter 1 verse 21 an animal is a living soul, and in verse 24 the same thing, living creature, living soul. But there is something very different between the living souls that are animals and the living soul that is man. For in the case of man there is contact with God.

God breathed into him the breath of life, n'shamah chayim. Now we'll talk about that in a moment, but that definite connection with God is something that is different. So I'm inclined to think that, oh by the way, the Apostle Paul also has something to say about this, because he talks about different kinds of flesh.

And he says the animals have one kind of flesh and human beings have another. But if it is true that we came from animals, through theistic evolution, God's control of the evolutionary processes, that would seem to be contrary again to the revelation of the word of God. So I'm inclined to think that we are happiest and we are in most harmony with the word of God when we believe that the creation that is described in Genesis chapter 1 is a creation by divine fire, and that evolutionary processes were not involved in the creation of God.

They were involved in the creation of man. Now there are three acts here, and I want you to look at the first verb in verse 7. Then the Lord God formed. What a beautiful word that is.

It is a word incidentally that is used in the Old Testament of a potter. In Jeremiah chapter 18 it is used of the potter who takes clay and forms it into a kind of vessel that suits him. And so it's a word that suggests a skilled craftsman, and it suggests the skill of our great triune God in the creation of man.

The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground. It also suggests sovereign power, because one of the things that Jeremiah stresses in his description of the potter is the fact that he makes that the kind of vessel that he himself wishes that it should be. So it is a sovereign, skillful creator who is responsible for the creation of man.

In Psalm 139 verse 14 through verse 16, the psalmist speaks lyrically of the creation that God has accomplished. He says, I will give thanks to thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are thy works, and my soul knows it very well.

My frame is not hidden from thee. When I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth, thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in thy books they were all written. The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

And so he was fearfully and wonderfully made, and wonderfully made for a creative purpose that was known to God before man ever came into existence. He formed man of the dust from the ground. Luther used to like to say that we are simply a lump of earth, that is all.

And that word suggests, of course, that we have a lowly origin and no cause for pride. And furthermore, it suggests our mortality. Because if we are made from dust, it's not surprising that we read that when man sinned, that's exactly what happened to him.

He went back to the dust from which he had been made. Deity and dust, and yet the image of God in touch with God himself, but also in touch with the dust. No room for pride, room for fear, for we are mortal beings.

The fact that we are made of dust is evidence of the fact that we are able to die. And so we were created mortal beings, able to die. Now the second thing that is said has to do with the formation of man's spiritual being.

God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, his immaterial nature. Breathed is such a warmly personal word. One of the commentators says, it has the intimacy of a kiss.

And so as God constructed his man, he breathed into him the breath of life, very much reminiscent of the Lord Jesus Christ's words to the disciples after the resurrection. He breathed upon them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. And so here, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, nishmat chayim.

Now it is my feeling, it's very difficult to prove this, it is my feeling that this word nishamah is used only of man. Now later on, when we get to the seventh chapter, we will have a possibility of an exception. But I'll seek to explain that, and I don't do this dogmatically, but I'll seek to explain it to try to show that even there, this word does not refer to the animals.

That this is the distinguishing feature of man. He has nishamah, the breath that has come from God. And I think it is a reference to his spirit.

Man has a spirit. He has the capacity for fellowship with God. And that is something that the animals do not have.

Man has spirit. And even lost man has spirit. But the connection between the spirit of the man and God has been broken as a result of sin.

The very fact, too, that man has spirit from God is expressive of the fact that our spiritual life is a gift from God. Adam's ability to communicate with the Lord God in the garden of Eden was something that was given him in sovereign grace. Now I'm not going to make the obvious remark that the doctrines of the grace of God as understood thousands of years later were taught in the garden of Eden, although I believe that.

But it is the gracious work of God to make it possible for man to have contact with him. Never forget that. Luther used to speak about the alien dignity of man.

And he spoke about the alien dignity of man because he wanted to avoid feeling or anyone feeling that there was some innate dignity in man. And he pointed out that this dignity that we have does not rest upon our own human qualities, but the dignity that we have rests upon the relationship with God. And it is the relationship with God which dignifies man.

If he does not have that relationship with God, then his dignity is gone. There is no such thing as the dignity of man today as it is commonly proclaimed by our liberal friends. And finally we read of the resultant person, and man became a living being.

The third act puts him among the living beings because it is said of the animals that they are living beings. But remember he is also over them because he is to subdue them. He is to fill the earth.

He is to subdue it. He is to rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth. So man has a body with which he has contact with the world about him, but he also has something else with which he has contact with God, his spirit.

And the combination of the body from the dust of the earth and the spirit from God resulted in a living soul, a living being. Now let me try to sum up some of the things that I'm trying to say to you. The doctrine of man could be set forth biblically in a threefold way.

There is man as created, man as fallen into sin, man as redeemed in grace. Now it is clear that if we have a doctrine of man, an answer to man, what is man? An answer to the question, if we affirm that man is man-created, man-fallen, man-redeemed, then we're talking about something that is fundamentally different from the consensus of liberal theology, modern contemporary theology. J. Gresham Machen was one of the most important of the evangelicals of the twentieth century, one of the greatest of the apologetes.

He wrote a book called Christianity and Liberalism, and in it he made the claim that there was an impassable chasm between liberal Christianity and biblical Christianity. And as a result of this impassable chasm between these two interpretations of the word of God, that liberal Christianity no longer deserved the name Christian at all. He was right.

It is not Christian. If we do not have a doctrine of man, when we are speaking about the biblical doctrine of man that does not encompass his creation, his fall, and his redemption, we do not have the biblical doctrine of man at all. Now let me sum up what we're saying here as a result of both of these chapters.

We're saying first that man is presented as the unique and special work of God. He is not the product of evolutionary processes. We're saying, second, that he is created in the image of God.

That is something that is not predicated on any other part of God's creation. We're saying, in the third place, that man is immediately given specific commands and duties. And that while he is given these duties and commands, he is at the same time an inferior created being, though created in the image of God.

In the fourth place, we are saying that man is given the privilege and responsibility of dominion over the creation of God. He is the king of the creation. And though he has lost his place by virtue of his sin, he shall be returned to his place as king of the world, through the redemption accomplished by the last Adam, the second man, the Lord Jesus.

And in his victory, man shall have his ultimate place and stature as ruler over the creation. In the fifth place, Adam, at creation, included in God's very good, suggests that man is essentially, not necessarily, a sinful being. Sin is not a necessary element in human nature.

Now it is a necessary element since the fall. But the fact that man existed apart from sin in the Garden of Eden is evident of the fact that sin is not an essential part of our being, and ultimately sin shall be eradicated from the lives of those who are the redeemed. Great to be one of the redeemed, isn't it? A covenant relationship is established here between the Creator and the Lord of his creation.

He is to till and keep the Garden of Eden on a probationary status. And finally, the divine letter of make indicates that the creation of man is the result of the divine counsel within the Godhead. Adam is not the result of chance, as Adam is not our modern scientists and theologians like to say.

He is not the result of a random toss of molecular dice. He is not the result of a wave in the primeval sea. His creation is a part of the all things that God works in his sovereign counsel.

And he has been created for a purpose. No wonder that modern man is so confused. His liberal faith has been destroyed, and now he is so confused because of his false thoughts that, as Pascal put it, he's drowning in the misery of a nobleman, the misery of a dethroned king.

I want to conclude with a couple of observations that a well-known theologian has made. This theologian who lived in the 16th century said this, without the knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. The reason that John Calvin said this is because man has been created in the image of God.

And if we do not have the knowledge of ourselves as created in the image of God, how can we know God? But then Mr. Calvin went on to say also that without the knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self. And so in order to understand what we are, we must look upon God, for we are created in the image of God. We can never hope to know ourselves if we do not know God.

That is why the modern world is wandering about in confusion. It does not know God. And because it does not know God, it does not know man, and cannot know man, who is created in the image of God.

Now if you were to, this week, want to attend a moving picture, what would you do? Well, would you say to your wife or your husband, let's go to the movie. And would you immediately jump in your automobile and go over to North Park or wherever it might be, and go up and buy your ticket without any questions about what is playing, walk in, give your ticket to the attendant, pick out either one of the options and attend, and then sit down in the movie and say, I wonder what's playing. I wonder what I'm going to be looking at.

Well, no, of course not. Every one of you would probably go to your newspapers and you would look and see the options that you have. And you'd want to see who's playing.

And furthermore, some of you who were rather sophisticated, not too curfew like myself and others, I mean blockhead, you'd probably even want to know who was the director of the movie. You'd want to know the movie, you would want to know the players, you would want to know the director. And then you'd make up your mind and you would go to the movie.

Now you know, we have been placed here upon this earth, and Shakespeare many years ago, and as you like it, wrote those famous words, all the world's a stage and all the men and women, merely players, they have their exits and their entrances. And one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages, and you remember he has words about the infant and about the schoolboy and about the lover and about the soldier and then about the judge or the lawyer, and then about the man who is in pantaloons that don't quite fit, and then finally of second childishness, and you remember the paragraph ends up something like this old man fawns teeth, fawns eyes, fawns taste, fawns everything. But there is a great deal of truth in this.

We are here. We're here in this great stage which God has created. And he has created us to play a part.

How would you like a play if the actors arrived and didn't know anything about their parts and just suddenly got on the stage and began to improvise as they went along? Total confusion, total pointlessness, total aimlessness. You know that's the way you could describe the lives of so many people? What is it? Well it's very much like Shakespeare says. There is the time when we're spitting up and carrying on like little infants, and there's the time when we seem to go in and out of the school building constantly, and then we play a few love scenes, and we rummage around in a lot of filing cabinets most of our lives, and then finally we're sitting in a house collecting checks through the mail.

Pointless, aimless. You know I have the idea that if we were to put it in human language, when it comes down to reading the account of a person's life, the Lord will come along and just write a little line in the margin. You didn't know the scenario.

You missed the point. You're just like a player that did not know his line, did not know the play, did not know what to do. Total confusion.

Don't you see that God has created us as individuals who have a basis of contact with Him? Of course there is a fall that has taken place. We need redemption. We need to know that we are sinners.

We need to know that Christ has died for sin. We need to know that if we do not believe in Him we shall be lost forever. But even after we have come to know Him, we need to know what is the scenario for human life.

And it is found right here in the Bible. Isn't it a terrible thing to go through all of life and to miss the point? Miss the whole point. So I say to you this morning, I don't know the status of most of you of course, but if

you're in Adam, and all of us are in Adam, there was a point in your time when you were lost and you may still be lost.

You do not know the forgiveness of sin. You do not know the possession of life. You do not know justification of life.

You do not know what it is to know God. That information is not yours. You're a natural man.

You cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are spiritually discerned. They are foolishness to you.

What you need is to recognize your sin. Recognize that Christ has died for sinners and flee to that cross in order to put your trust in Him that you may receive the free gift of eternal life. And then, having come to the knowledge of Him, to apply yourself to the Word of God to discover the plot, the scenario, the words by which our lives are to be governed in order that when the time comes for us to report to the Great Director, we will have played our part to His satisfaction.

The Word of God. The God of the Christian's life. So if you're here this morning without Christ, we appeal to you to come to Him, to come to know Him, so that life may begin.

And for you who are Christians, you have contact with the Lord. You are a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And God has a purpose for your life.

It would be terrible if the story of your life should have been written, as I was speaking a moment ago. You've missed the whole point of your human existence. May God speak to you.

Let's stand for the benediction. Father, we are grateful to Thee for the revelation of the Word of God, and especially for reminders that we have been made for fellowship with Thee. We remember those words that we learned as little children, that we were men who were created to glorify God and to enjoy Thee forever.

O God, may we get the point, and may our lives come to be lives that are in touch with Thee through the Holy Spirit. And may we be useful in the time that we have to accomplish the purposes that Thou dost desire. May grace, mercy, and peace go with us, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

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