

Does Being Human Matter?

Genesis 1:26-27

I. The Introduction

Today, we begin our summer series called “Does it matter?” This series essentially came out of questions like this - What difference does your Christian faith make for the way we live our lives? As graduates (congrats to all of you graduates), as college students (welcome home to all of you), as single people, as parents, as grandparents? For the way you live as businesswomen and business men? What difference does our faith make for our use of money, for our hobbies, for what we eat, for what we love, for what we spend our time doing. What difference does our Christian faith make in our everyday life in this world?

Os Guinness, the popular evangelical writer, makes this observation: On the whole, “Christian Evangelicals live no differently than their pagan neighbors” (21). That’s a provocative statement, but has caused me to critique my life over the last 6 months. How do I look different from my unbelieving neighbors because of my faith? I claim that Jesus is Lord, a comprehensive statement that covers the totality of life. Therefore, I should acknowledge him in all my ways, but do I? Indeed, it’s a searching question.

Now, Guinness makes this comment because he is aware of how our secular culture, that operates with a worldview without reference to the living God, influences us, believers, according to its values and its behaviors. And, this causes the big questions of life, such as meaning and truth and character and even faith, to become irrelevant in our daily life. And, here’s the danger, this absorption of a lifestyle without reference to the living God typically happens subconsciously, without us even perceiving it.

It’s like the fable of the frog in boiling water. If you place a frog in boiling water, it will immediately jump out because it recognizes the danger. But, if you put a frog in warm water, then slowly bring the water to a boil, the frog will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death.

This is the danger for us who desire to be in the world but not of it. We don’t even perceive the danger. Typically we accuse our teenagers of falling prey to peer pressure, but we adults fall prey to it as well, and we typically don’t even perceive it.

And, so we must remain vigilant and think critically about how we live our lives with Jesus as Lord. And, so, for our summer series, we will explore eight significant topics that sometimes our culture influences us to think they don’t matter.

If you have been around PBCC for any length of time, you will know that we typically preach expositionally through books of the Bible. One of our key family values is “devotion to God’s Word,” and we take that very seriously, and are committed to it. But, by preaching this way, we sometimes do not hit particular topics, because we go where the texts lead us. Summers, however, give us a chance to try different things. For instance, our summer series are team taught due to vacations and holidays. But, summers also provide us a chance to explore in

different ways. And, after much prayer and discussion, we felt the Lord lead us to explore eight topics that affect our everyday lives. We only have eight weeks, and we know that there are many, many other topics we could explore.

The eight topics are: humanity, matter, Jesus, marriage, Sabbath, missions, church and community. Do *those 8 topics* matter? Does being human really matter? Does matter matter? Does Jesus matter? That Sunday is celebration Sunday after SportsCamp, and we hope to have many visitors that day to hear about Jesus. Does marriage still matter? With such a plurality of views on marriage, does marriage matter anymore? Does Sabbath matter? Does missions still matter? That weekend will be a missions weekend for us, which the Missions Council will have other activities going on, which will be announced as we get closer. Does church matter? Does being engaged in a physical church matter anymore? Does community matter? In our individualistic culture, does community really matter or is being isolated a healthy option?

So, this is what we want to explore this summer. We believe these topics do matter, and they matter a lot. Why? Because they matter to God. And, if they matter to God, they should matter to us. They are significant topics, and with anything that is significant in life, God has a lot to say about it in Scripture. And, what we want to do each week is bring to light what God has to say about these topics and make you aware of how significant these topics are in the life of faith. We could spend multiple weeks on any one of these topics, but of course we can't. So, this summer will hope to simply begin the conversation with you. For some of the weeks, we will have sermon discussions after 2nd service, either in FH or in the Library. We will also announce these as we get closer to each one. Next Sunday there will be a lunch in the Library to continue the conversation, Does Matter Matter? I have a guest speaker sharing his life and ministry in sustainable farming.

So, that's our introduction for the summer. I hope these will be fruitful discussions for us as a body.

And, now, I want to transition to "Does being human matter?" This topic, in many ways, is a foundation for everything else in life, and is a topic that we have covered in the past, but if you're anything like me, you could use a reminder of this truth every day.

II. Does Being Human Matter?

Mark Twain once said, "Man was made at the end of the week's work, when God was tired" (Provan, 77). Is he right? Is humanity simply an afterthought of God? Does being human matter?

Our text this morning is Genesis 1:26-27. This is day 6 of the creation account.

Now, if we were to read the entire creation narrative, the first 25 verses of the Bible, we would see a pattern like this:

'Then God Said', 'Then God Said', 'Then God said,'...

Let there be, Let there be, Let there be...

And there was, And there was, And there was...

Then, when God makes the creatures, we get the creatures are created “according to their kind.” And, it was good and it was good and it was good and it was good....

And, on day six, we come to humanity. And, the pattern would lead us to expect the same pattern for humanity. We would expect something like this:

“Then God said, ‘Let the earth produce man according to their kind.’ And it was so. Then God made man according to their kind. And, God saw that it was good.” (*For more information, see Bernard Bell’s Genesis sermon from 2008*).

But that’s not what we find. Man is not just another animal according to their kind.

Here’s what we find -

III. The Image (Gen 1:26-27) (ESV)

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

A. The Image Language

The pattern breaks with humanity. God does not create humanity according to their kind. He creates them in his image. “The pattern is broken in every possible way” (Bell). That means we are going to get something very, very unique and very, very special. Humanity is created in God’s likeness, in his image. Even after the fall, humanity continues to bear the image of God. In Genesis 9:6, it is repeated that man is made in God’s image. So, even though humanity is tainted with sin, humanity continues to bear God’s image.

But what does “image” or “likeness” mean? People have tried to explain this over the centuries with varying results.

I think the best way to think about image/likeness is using three words: reflection, representation and responsibility. We will talk responsibility next week. Today we will focus on reflection and representation.

- **Reflection:** Humanity is to reflect God. Does being human matter? We REFLECT the LIVING GOD! That seems significant to me. We are to reflect his nature and character. In other words, the rest of creation is to look at us, humanity, and see the nature and character of the living God. Some of the ways we reflect him are in:
 - Our ability to create.
 - Our ability to communicate.
 - Our ability to reason.
 - Our ability to make moral choices.

- A primary one is our ability to relate in love. God is love, and in order for God to be love, there must be a plurality of persons within the Godhead. We call this the Trinity. At the very center of the universe is a relationship of love, not power. To be an image-bearer is to be in relationships of love. Simon and Garfunkel famously sang a song called, “I am a Rock; I am an Island” (Simon, track 5). Well no. That is not what it means to be made in the image of God. As image-bearers, we only truly become ourselves when we relate to others in love because that’s God, a trinity of mutual love.” “This is why,” as one writer says, “broken relationships hurt more than broken bones” (Johnson, 30).
- And, we reflect God in our character.
 - Throughout Scripture, we see that God is a God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; forgiving sins to multiple generations. So, to be image-bearers is to be compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, overflowing and forgiveness.
- That’s reflecting the living God.

How about representation?

- **Representation:** As far as representation goes, most theologians see Genesis 1 as God, the awesome, powerful and benevolent king building his kingdom. And, when kings build their kingdoms, they put statues of themselves all over the kingdom so people don’t forget them. Kings want to be remembered by the people, so they put statues everywhere. In the Bible, God puts his statues all over his kingdom, us. He wants everyone to remember him, so he puts his statues all over the earth. That’s you and me. As CS Lewis said, “This world is a great sculptor’s shop. We are the statues and there’s a rumor going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come alive” (Lewis, 158). When we meet Jesus, we come alive.

So, reflection and representation are how we can understand image of God language. What we can’t miss is the astonishing point being made in these verses. In the Bible, there is a great chasm between creator and creation. That anything would be made in the image of God is astonishing. It really is unique and special and highly exalted language. Psalm 8, which we read for our call to worship today, uses this sort of language.

What makes this even more astonishing is to understand it within the context of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures. One of the main reasons for the Genesis text is to be a polemic, an argument, against the creation stories from the surrounding cultures of the Ancient Near East. Genesis is an argument over against those other creation stories. If you would ask the question, “Does being human matter?” to any other culture in the Ancient Near East, you would get a very different answer. For in all those other cultures, humanity is simply made to be slaves of the gods. In other words, being human really doesn’t matter, unless you were one person. Who was that? The king. And, women were typically not even included in the creation stories, because they weren’t fully human.

B. The Radical Truth

This is the greatness of the Biblical story! The Biblical story raises every single person to the status of royalty, including women and children. This is why God is the God of the fatherless, the defender of widows and loves the alien. This is why Jesus says let the little children come to me. This is why Jesus eats with low-lives and outcasts. Because every single person is royalty, made in his image! It is a radical, radical truth! All people created in the image of God, deserving utmost dignity and respect. Every person represents God on this earth! No person is an accident. Every person is fearfully and wonderfully made.

Now, let me try to illustrate this. There are 7 chairs up here, representing 7 different people. Let me introduce you to these people I know. Of course, the names have been changed.

- This first one is Gene. He's a white man and a progressive, highly successful and powerful businessman working in the tech industry here in the Silicon Valley. He's made in the image of God and deserves the utmost dignity and respect.
- The second is John. John is a homeless man struggling with addiction and mental illness. He has been forgotten by society but not by God. He is made in his image and deserves utmost dignity and respect.
- The third is Melissa. Melissa is in late 20s and is an outspoken homosexual. She has been rejected by her family, but not by God. She is made in his image and deserves utmost dignity and respect.
- The fourth is David. David is in the country illegally and lives in fear every day. He is made in the image of God, matters tremendously to God and is worthy of a relationship.
- The fifth is Hal. Hal is a teenager. Most of his extended family still calls him by his birth name Heather. He is made in the image of God and deserves utmost dignity and respect.
- The sixth is Edward. Edward is a practicing Muslim, praying five times every day. He is made in the image of God and deserves utmost dignity and respect.
- The seventh is Gretchen. Gretchen is a teenager and is severely handicapped. She has also been forgotten by society, but not by God. She is made in his image, represents him on this earth and deserves utmost dignity and respect.

Now, I could have used any one of the typical prejudices that we live with. I could have used a republican or a democrat or a person who doesn't use their turn signals on the road, or I a Dodgers fan.

Every person is made in the image of God and represents him on this earth. These are the ground rules.

But, how often do we tend to exclude people that don't look like us? How often do we live as if we are the only ones made in his image? Who do you tend to think don't matter? Where do you tend to draw lines? Who do you feel superior to? Our culture tends to shape us to exclude, to treat the other as "other" and to live in great fear for the other.

The beauty of our faith is that Christianity crosses every single boundary. Why? Because Jesus crossed every single boundary with his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. In life, he does not condemn the woman caught in adultery, he welcomes the woman at the well, he eats with prostitutes and sinners. He will go to the cross for all of them and for every person, because he wants every person to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). No one is excluded from his open arms on the cross. These are the ground rules.

C. The Witness of Early Christians

You know the early church understood this. In that society, considered the cradle of western civilization, only adult males had value. The women, children and slaves aren't fully human.

And, the early Christians turned that world upside-down. How? Because they recognized and lived the truth that every person is made in the image of God.

For example, in the first century, female babies, unwanted babies and deformed babies were thrown onto garbage dumps. It was called "exposing." They had no value, so they were simply discarded. It was socially acceptable. A letter from that time from a husband to his pregnant wife said this:

"Know that I am still in Alexandria. And do not worry if they all come back and I remain in Alexandria. I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child [before I come home], if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it" (Stark, 98).

This is normal in the first century. And, Christians transformed it. How? Because they scoured the garbage dumps looking for exposed babies. Why? Because they wanted to reflect and represent the God who says let the little children come to me.

Within the next 200 years, two great epidemics hit the Roman world. Probably 1 out of every 3 people died. On some days, it was said that over 5000 people died. What did the Christians do? While everyone else was getting out of dodge, they stayed back to take care of the sick, many of them losing their lives. Why? Because they wanted to reflect and represent the God who is present, and who weeps with the suffering.

As I was writing this this week, I realized this is what happened in Liberia during the Ebola epidemic. All the hospitals closed because no one wanted to deal with Ebola patients. They all closed except Samaritan's Purse. Samaritan's Purse stayed and reflected and represented God during that terrible tragedy. Watch the movie "*Facing Darkness*" and you'll see.

D. The Modern Predicament

Here in the West, more of us need to recover this attitude. As I said in the introduction, we live in a secular world, a world that operates with no reference to God. And, the fact is that a "Godless society is an inhumane society" (Gay, 3). We see this in the mass shootings that are an epidemic now. We see this in how life is cheapened at the beginning and end of life. We

see this in how we treat our technology as if it is more valuable than the person seated next to us. We see this in how we objectify others. Women are objectified by men. Men are objectified by women. In the workplace, the questions revolve around what can you deliver? What can you do for me? The human person is reduced to simply a function. Genuine personal relationship is sacrificed on the altar of success, driven by the almighty dollar. And, the result of this objectification is what? We think we have value based on what we do or how we look.

So, what do we do?

IV. The Implication – BE COURAGEOUS!

- A. **Be courageous to reflect and represent God.** Be courageous to reflect the nature and character of God. Be courageous to show the world the truth that every human matters. Andy Crouch in his book *Tech-Wise Family*, says this is a principal reason for the home and family – to learn together how to be “less fearful and more courageous” to look like God (Crouch, 68). Be courageous to reflect and represent God, showing the world that every human matters. This is why Leong goes to the prison. This is why we go to Liberia and King City and Romania. This is why we work with IJM. This is why we do the Bridges class and Sports Camp. But, this is also why you’ve been called by God to where you are going tomorrow morning. He has called you to live courageously as a reflection and a representative of God by loving your neighbor, your colleague, your classmate, your teacher, whoever you interact with because they all represent God too! At the grocery store, in the restaurant, on the soccer field – Being human matters and every human being matters. We need to courageously live this truth, so that when people look at us, they say – Oh, that is what the living God looks like. That’s what the God of love looks like. This is primarily how we will live differently from our un-believing neighbors. Not living in fear of others, but recognizing that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). – which primarily involves this -
- B. **Be courageous to practice relationships.** Resist the cultural temptation to objectify for the sake of money, control and manipulation. Be courageous to practice genuine relationships. And, that involves a lot of time and a lot of listening. Did you ever notice that Jesus lived 30 years before proclaiming the Sermon on the Mount? Incarnation preceded proclamation. Those are big words simply to mean enter into a relationship before sharing a position. Entering into precedes speaking against. Be courageous. In general, people won’t remember what you say, but they will remember how they felt around you. Be courageous to practice relationships in love and kindness.

Do you know the name Rosario Butterfield? I think her story is a good story for how to practice genuine relationship. She had become a militant atheist homosexual intellectual, professor of English at Syracuse University. In 1997, she wrote an article for a local newspaper, attacking Christianity. Knowing she would receive much mail, she kept two boxes on her desk, one for hate mail and one for fan mail. But, one letter “defied her filing system.” It was from a local elderly pastor and his wife, and was a kind, inquiring letter, simply asking her questions, not presenting any position. He did not mock. He simply engaged, and invited her to dinner with his wife. She initially threw it away, but fished it

out and set it in the middle of her two boxes on her desk. She ended up, after a long time accepting the dinner invitation and becoming friends. In her words, they did not “treat her as a blank slate.” They treated her with utmost dignity and respect, engaged her in relationship and entered her world. In her words, “And because [they] did not invite me to church, I knew it was safe to be friends.” She was no object, she represented God as an image-bearer. She eventually tumbled to the truth because she was treated as an image-bearer. (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/my-train-wreck-conversion.html>, accessed 06/03/19).

Be courageous to practice genuine relationships, reflecting the God of love who has made every person in his image in love.

Conclusion

I want to finish this morning with a plastic lawnmower. Rikk Watts used this illustration many years ago, and I have found it to be helpful for me. Maybe it will be helpful for you as well. Treating every person we meet as an image bearer can be terribly hard and to be consistent with. We have bad days. We are tired most of the time. Our daily life is busy and frazzled. And, for us introverts, people can get in our way a lot. But, can you simply give it a go? It's like a kid with a plastic lawnmower. They're never going to push this lawnmower in straight lines. They're all over the place. Does mom and dad yell at them? No! Their simply happy their kid is out there. That's the same with God. He just wants you to get out there and try it. You're not going to be perfect, but just take out your plastic lawnmowers and give it a go.

Amen.

Benediction

As you go, may the God of love
pour his love deep down into your heart
so that your love will abound more and more
driving out your fear of the other
and you will be pure and blameless
for the day of Christ
to the glory and praise of our God and father.
Amen

Resources

Bell, Bernard, Sermon on 1/20/08, *An Image for God's Temple*.

Butterfield, Rosario, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (for the complete story).

Crouch, Andy, *Tech-wise Family*.

Gay, Craig, *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist*.

Guinness, Os, *The Last Christian On Earth*.

Johnson, Darrell, *The Story of All Stories: Genesis 1-11*.

Lewis, CS, *Mere Christianity*.

Provan, Iain, *Seriously Dangerous Religion*.

Simon, Paul, Track 5 on side 2 of *Sounds of Silence*.

Stark, Rodney, *The Rise of Christianity*.