

OUR PLACE IN THE STORY

WONDER

Genesis 1:26-28 // Craig Smith

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CRAIG: Good Morning Mission Hills, I came back. That was in spite of my first full week in the audience or the office, seeing what the week's done to me, where I had a few moments where I was not at all sure what I got myself into. But I'm glad to be here, I'm glad to be with you.

Actually, my parents were in town last weekend. We got to do a little bit of Colorado stuff and we ended up down in Manitou Springs, ever been to Manitou Springs? One person, really, likes that, interesting. I don't know that I've ever spent any real time down there, and with this kind of a neat town, a little bit of a funky town. But my mom was really impressed by how many people were out wandering the streets, and that's probably because they live in Ohio and in Ohio, nobody goes out and wanders around streets. Because in the summer is ridiculously hot and 7,000 percent humidity, and in the winter it's ridiculously cold and also seven thousand percent humidity it's a cold...so nobody goes out.

She was really struck by how many people were out and about the benefit of being retired. She kind of lost track of days so she asked me at what point "What day is it today?" I said, "Well, its Friday." And she goes, "Wow, all these people here on Friday." And then she said this, she said, "I bet on the weekend, there are so many people here that you couldn't stir them with a stick." And that's weird, right? Maybe you've heard that phrase "Can't stir them with a stick". Not many of you. Honestly, she said that.

Both my parents were born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. My mom went to high school with Elvis, she did not like him but she went to high school with him. They are Deep South in their roots and every now and then, actually quite a bit, my parents say things that I go "What are you talking about?" I just kind of learned to ignore most of this, but this one really grabbed me, though. As we were driving I kept thinking "So many people you can't stir them with a stick" And I was like "Why are they in a pot?" I finally said to her, I said "Mom, that's not a thing people say, that's not a real phrase" And my kids are, I can see then in the backseat of car going, "It's not." But my dad jumps in and is like "No, it's totally a thing" So, apparently that is a thing that people say.

I tried to figure it out, that's what I wanted today, I was like okay, "Obviously you mean there's a lot of people, but why are we stirring them with a stick?" I can imagine too many people to beat with a stick, I get that one. But stirring them with a stick, I was trying to push in on like why do we say that? You know, where did it come from? And it was pretty clear that they're both like "It's just what you say". We're like "No, it's not", But they really had no idea where it came from and I started thinking, you know, I think there's probably a lot of this kind of things that we just say and we don't really think much about them, in fact, how many of you ever had the experience that you said to somebody something that you heard growing up, it was a normal thing, and you said it to somebody else they looked at you like "What is wrong with you? That is not a thing people say." Anybody had that experience?

I think we all have it, you know, and I remember years ago when our daughter Lynae [SP], was really young and we were driving somewhere and she did something nice and so, you know, we said, "Thank you Lynae." And she goes "I'll take all the pleasure." We were like, "What?" Oh, she'd heard us say, you know, "The pleasure is all mine." So much you turn that into a possessive. I'm about taking that pleasure, please. They just, you know, that there are these things that we say, we don't, you know, we don't really think much about them. And I mention that because we're going to look at this morning at a passage of scripture where there's a thing that God says, and it's a thing that we say a lot. If you are grown up in the church, if you spend a lot of time around Christians, it's a phrase you're going to be familiar with, we use it a lot. And I think it's one of those things that kind of, the rest of the world goes "What are you talking about? what do you mean by that?" And I think that a lot of times our response



is “I don’t know, we just say this a lot.”

You have your Bible, love that you’d turn with me to the book of Genesis. If you’re not real familiar with the Bible, it’s an easy book to find, it’s at the very beginning. If you don’t have a Bible please, feel free to take one of those from the seats in front of you, in fact, if you don’t have a Bible please consider that our gift to you. We’d love you to take that home and for you to have that. I’m going to be reading this morning from the New International Version, the ones in the seats are the English standard. But they’re very close, just couple of differences in words. We’re going to be jumping in this morning at chapter 1, verse 20, which is where we left off last week. Last week we saw that God prepares before he populates, and, so, we saw him kind of get the stage ready for the really good things he wants to do, and this morning we begin to see God doing these good things that we were anticipating.

Chapter 1, verse 20, And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky. So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them.” And said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds. The livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.”

We’re going to pause for just a moment here. What comes next here in Genesis is the description of God creating our favorite thing, which would be us, right? And, of course. You know, we’re naturally predisposed to think that we’re the most important, right? And so, we should naturally assume that when God’s talk about creating human beings. We’re the most important thing he’s ever created, right? Some of you are like “Yeah”, others like “That can’t be right”, But it is, actually. And, in a number of ways, God indicates that what he’s about to do is special, it’s different.

So, as we continue on, I want you to look for the ways that God describes the creation of human beings in different terms, that the ways that he talks about it that indicate this is different, this is special. And then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

You see the way that he talks about us is a little bit different. There are several ways that indicate that this is special. One of the ways that he does it is that he actually talked about creating human beings three separate times, did you catch it in verse 27? “And so God created mankind in his own image.” And then, if you were here last week, it’s like these little Russian dolls. That’s not enough, that’s a big statement, we got to go in, we got to peel the layers of...he says the second time “In the image of God he created them.” Take that one and third go even deeper, “Male and female he created them.” Three separate times he talks about creating human beings and that repetition clearly is intended to sort of emphasize it and say this matters. Everything God does matters, but something about this matters extra.

Another way I think that God indicates that this is different, is that he kind of uses some slightly strange language when he talks about creating us, doesn’t he? Did you catch it? He said, “Let us make mankind in our image.” It uses plural pronouns and that’s a little bit of a strange thing. Because one thing is we understand, one of the clearest teachings of all of the Bible is that there’s how many gods? There’s just one, so the pronouns we expect is “I will make her”, “let me”, but instead he goes this



plural “Let us make in our image.” We have to ask the question, why the plural language here? One option I’ve heard suggested over the years is, well, maybe this is including the Angels, maybe he’s sort of talking about angels here. The problem with that is, there’s nowhere else in scripture where angels are included in God’s work like this.

Angels do what God commands but they’re not involved in his creative work, bringing things into existence. We’ve never seen it anywhere else. I think it’s very unlikely that angels are in mind here. Another option that we sometimes go towards, and I think this may be the more common one is to go, maybe what God’s doing is, he’s revealing the fact that he is a Trinity. How many of you have heard that? And certainly that makes a certain amount of sense, and I want you to understand, I absolutely believe in the Trinity, but I’m not sure that these plural pronouns, I’m not sure this “us” our language here is about the Trinity.

The reason I say that is this the Jewish people had the scripture for over a 1,000 years before Jesus arrived, they read the scripture day in and day out, and yet they never suspected that God was a Trinity. How did they miss it? I mean, it’s so obvious, right? And the only way that you can explain that they would have missed it is, if they read this “us” in our language and thought that it meant something else, what else could have it meant?

The answer, I think, is that there was a way in the ancient world that Kings sometimes spoke, we actually have a label for. It’s very common, it’s common enough that we give it a title, and it’s called the Majestic Plural. So that’s called the Royal Plural. It was a way the King would sometimes make declarations of tremendous significance. Only Kings would do, it was kind of their way of saying “It’s not just me, it’s me and the kingdom together, it’s the whole package.” They didn’t just use it for casual statements. No King ever said, “Let us go forth and get a snack.”

Okay was, let us go to battle and defend our kingdom, let us enact a tax, let us enact a treaty, but they were always statements are closely connected to the kingdom itself. And it only those points with the King speaks in the plural. It seems that most of the Jewish readers 4,000 years or so, when they read this they said, “Yes God is speaking as a king and is making a declaration about his kingdom.” Which means that what he’s about to say, again, is of tremendous significance, and there’s that pregnant, there’s that moment, where he’s about to announce what he’s going to do and we go, it’s not just another act of creation, it’s an act of creation that somehow in inextricably, indivisibly connected to his kingdom.

As we saw last week, one of the things that Genesis 1 is doing, consistently, is revealing God as King, that God chose his kingdom because he creates by speaking. God chose his king because he names and he draws to himself those things that he makes, takes possession of them. God shows himself as a king by setting the boundaries and the limits, and here, again, God sets himself up, so that we understand that he’s a king and that what he’s doing is closely connected to his kingdom. Which is this other thing that makes this unique, makes it different, makes it special. He makes this huge statement, this is a kingdom statement and then he makes us, but when he makes us, he says, “Let us make mankind in our image in our likeness.” And there’s the phrase, there’s the thing that we say all the time, human beings are made in the image of God. We say it all the time to each other, and we say to the world and the world looks at us and goes “What are you talking about? What does that mean?”

I found over the years that oftentimes when the world asks us back, “What do you mean when you say were made in the image of God?”, a lot of times we find ourselves going, I don’t know it’s just something we say. What we have to say, okay it clearly it means that we are important, it means that we matter, it means the significance of human beings. But I think we struggle sometimes to understand, how it means that? Is exactly, how it communicates that? And in the process of doing that we also failed to understand how incredibly significant a statement it is, so what does this mean? What does it mean to be made in the image and the likeness of God?

Well, the first thing I want to make sure we do is to understand that image and likeness probably mean, basically, the same thing. They’re not two separate words, and the reason there’s two words in because in the Hebrew writing, the way you emphasize the importance of something was you said it and you said it again, in a slightly different way we drive it home. You see that in the Psalms over and over, you read the Psalms and you read a line and when you read the next line, you like, “Is kind of saying the same thing? Just slightly different words.” Because they want to drive that point home, and, so, here, by using image and



likeness, which are basically synonyms and throughout scripture they're often used interchangeably. Well, what the author is doing, what God is doing is he's saying, "This matters, pay attention. I got to drive this point home." So we're left trying to figure out, "What exactly does it mean? What's the concept here, in these words? What does it mean that were the image the likeness of God?"

One of the ways that I think we've commonly tried to answer the questions we say, "Well, maybe, just maybe the image is something we have, it's some characteristic that we possess that makes us similar to God, something that we have that makes us a little bit like God." We know when we start trying to figure out what it is, one of the things we often come back to say, "Well, for instance, one of the things we have is we have reasoning, we can think about things and reason through and think abstractly. Basically, we're smart." If you ever watch daytime television, I think that gets called into question pretty quick. But, the point is, you know, that we're not like the other creatures, because we can really think and reason, and all this kind of stuff, and so we often default to that. That's what we have, we have an intellect, and that makes a similar to God and no other creatures have that.

Or perhaps it's morality. We're able to perceive right from wrong and that makes us like God, we're similar to him in that respect, and yet no other creature has the ability to tell right from wrong. Or maybe it's emotion, we have real emotions and no other creatures have those, and God has those, so we're like him. Or maybe its relationship, we're able to build relationships with others and no other creatures can build relationships. I think there's a couple of problems with that way of thinking about the image. One of them is that as soon as we began talking about a particular characteristic, we have to recognize that some people have more or less of that characteristic, right?

We're going to talk about intelligence, some people are smarter. Like there are a lot of people a whole lot smarter than me, and there are some people who are not quite as smart as me. Here's the problem, we make it about equality, very quickly quantity comes into. If it's about quality, then we almost end up having to say that, you know, if intelligence is what makes somebody the image of God, then if somebody's a little bit smarter they must be what? More the image of God, and if somebody's not quite as bright they must be less the image of God. So then, we had this idea that people are different levels of the image of God. Is anybody comfortable with that? I hope not, that's how you get things like the Nazis. this idea that people have more or less value depending on how much of a particular characteristic they have, plus, there's nowhere in God's Word where there's any description of levels of the image. what God, simply says is image, image, image, image, image, not 98 % image, 27 % image, 103... none of that is, it's just image. So, this quality/quantity things, that's dangerous and it's not biblical.

The other problem with it is, to be perfectly honest, there are other creatures that have some of these qualities, aren't there? How many of you have dogs? Okay, maybe you think your dogs love you, it's real, right? It's real, it's not, you know...I know, cat owners are here going no, they don't, you just feed them. Now, you know, I have gone away from my house and left bowls full of food and the dog misses me, this dog does not eat the food till I come home. As soon as the dog sees me, she's like, "Okay you're home, now I can eat." There's an attachment going on there, okay?

I remember a few years ago, I was in seminary, we had a golden retriever that we brought out from Ohio with us. I came home and when I opened the door, the dog did not greet me the way she normally did and she was there, I saw her. She was just sort of laying in the in the foyer with her head down, and she wouldn't look at me. And as you know, if you had dealt with dogs at all, when your dog won't look at you, the first thing you have to start asking is what did you do? All right? So I started looking and couldn't find anything wrong. I got the upstairs bedroom, walk in the bedroom and I immediately saw on the floor in the middle of the room was a little pile of leather and paper. What is that? That is my wife's Bible. Well, that was my wife's Bible and the dogs not looking and she's like "I don't know what happened."

The only thing I can think is that her Bible was on the edge of the bed, and the dog jumped on the bed after we were gone, it fell off and make kind of a neat noise, she's like, let's investigate. So she started working with it and it was crinkly pages, as those are neat. Turns out if you put your paws and rip on them with your teeth, that makes a really neat noise. I think she just kind of went crazy because it was in tiny pieces, and I think at some point she had to kind of go on, "What have I done? Maybe if I push



it all back together.” And she had gotten all the pieces, and they were in this really close pile. And then, I think she looked at it saying “It’s not going to work, they’re still going to be able to tell, I’ll go wait for him downstairs.”

Now, listen, I’m not saying that’s the same level of intelligence, or guilt, morality, or anything that we have, but remember quantity is not the issue, that’s dangerous. I mean, clearly, she displayed some degree of intelligence trying to push it together, right? And some degree of remorse and guilt. That’s the problem, animals have some of these characteristics and, you know, there’s at least one of the creature that have all of the characteristics that we sometimes point to and say, “That’s what it means to be the image of God, that’s how we’re unique.” There’s another creature that has the whole package and may even have them in greater quantity than we do. You know what creature I’m thinking about? Don’t say dolphins, it’s not dolphins, it’s angels.

They’re intelligent, they have language, they have relationships according to Scripture, they can tell right from wrong, some of them fell and became what we call demons or demonic spirits. They get the whole package and yet, God never calls them the image of God, not once. That is only a word ever reserved for you and I. I don’t think this quality issue works this characteristic, I just don’t think it is consistent with the rest of Scripture. Sometimes we go, okay, well, then maybe it’s not something we have. Maybe, maybe the image is something that we do, maybe it’s some activity that we engage in that makes us similar to God. Usually, the one that we default to is the idea that it’s when we rule and reign, that’s why we’re the image because we can rule and reign. God says that, right?

He says, “Fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, and every living creature that moves and rule over them.” Well, God rules and so we’re his image because we also rule. Again, you have a lot of similar problems. Different people rule, different people lead to different degrees, you got that quantity problem going on, and angels do the same thing. Angels clearly have command, and there’s things they rule and reign over, but again, we’re the only ones ever called the image. So, it’s not a characteristic we possess or an activity we engage in. What is it? What does it mean to be the image of God?

Well, understand, you know, God’s careful with his words, do you know that? That’s not arbitrary anyway. He picks his words, and according to God’s own word, he says all Scripture is God-breathed, every word matters. In this particular case, the words that he’s chosen are actually very significant. The word that he uses here for image in Hebrew is *tselim*, and you don’t you don’t need to memorize that, but it’s interesting that if you look up *tselim* in the Hebrew Bible, you’re going to see the word *tselim*, again, here translated as image, shows up a lot. It’s a pretty common word in Scripture, but it’s interesting as in when you see other times where *tselim* is used it’s not always translated as “image”. It’s often translated in some different ways and I think it’s interesting to look at some of the other ways *tselim* gets translated.

We’re going to pop up a verse from 2nd Kings. Now, I’m gonna tell you this, one of these words here is a translation of *tselim*, it’s a translation of the same word that in Genesis 1:26 is translated as “image”, so one of these words same thing as image, right? We got to figure out which word this is, “All the people of the land went down to the temple of Baal and they tore it down. They smashed the altars and the idols to pieces.”

One of those words, *tselim*, same word as in 1:26, in Genesis as image. Question is which word? But if you think that it’s the word “people”. Good guess. It’s wrong, but it’s a good guess, sorry. Okay, how about “temple?” Yeah, no, it’s not actually “temple”. The word here that’s translated from *tselim* is actually “idol”, okay. That’s weird, right?

So, wait a minute, so it is God picked the same word that in some places means “idol” to talk about us? Like, God said, let us make human beings as our idols? Anybody comfortable with that? You probably are not because, of course, when you think about an idol good or bad, is good or bad? They’re bad, right? Why would God say let’s make humans as their idols? Well, there’s something a little bit more complex going on here, but it’s really important to get a hold of part of the reason we struggle with that, I think, is that we’re not quite sure what idols are.



I mean, you have these little statues that people would bow down and worship, and we know they're bad, because they're idols of false gods and goddesses, and that kind of thing. But I don't know if you've had this experience. When I was growing up I tended also to think that the practice of making idols was kind of proof that those people were kind of stupid, right? Because how dumb do you have to be to make a statue of something and bow down and worship it? Right? Like why would you worship that thing? It didn't make you, you made it, I just watched you. You didn't even do a good job that thing is ugly, and you're going to bow down and worship it, and that's not actually right.

They weren't actually worshipping those statues, they were worshipping those things that we call idols. What they're actually worshipping was a god or gods or spirit that was represented by the idol. And that's a little subtle, but was pushed into because it's an important thing to understand. What an idol was, was a physical representation of a spirit. They understood spirits don't have bodies, they live in the spiritual realm. But we live in the physical realm, and so they would make a physical thing to represent that spirit. And that physical thing then became a focal point for the worship of the spirit, but the other thing they were hoping would happen is they were hoping the spirit they were worshipping would exhibit, they would manifest its power through that little thing.

They would think that little thing kind of became a conduit for which the power of that spirit would come into the world, are you with me? That's what tselim was, what an idol was. It's a physical representation of spirit that they hoped would become the way that God made its presence felt in the world. Some of you are starting to put some stuff together, I can see it. This is the word that God uses when he says "Let's make human beings as our tselim." As our image.

To be the image of God means that we are made to be the physical representatives of God in creation, it means that we were made to be the way that God expresses his presence, his power in the world that he's made. An interesting story in the Old Testament, when Israel have been enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years and God came in power, he said: "I free you". And you may know the story, the plagues that he brought upon the Egyptians and how the Egyptians said "Get out, go." And that they went out, and they got to the edge of the sea, right? And they said "We're going to die because Pharaoh's army is coming." And what did God do? He parted the sea. And then they escaped through dry land, and then, when the Pharaoh's army came in, the sea crashed in and destroyed the enemies of God's people.

They got into the desert and they said "We're going to die, there's no food here." And food fell out of the sky." They said "We're going to die because there's no water here." And water was bursting forth from rocks. There was a pillar of fire and smoke that God used to lead them, and after all of these things they got to the edge of Mount Sinai, and as they were there, Moses went on top of the mountain God came down to meet him, and there was thunder and lightning and the people stood around and said: "This is incredible that God, that God who has more power than we ever dreamed possible, is meeting right there. Remember how he set us free? You remember what he did? It's incredible he is right there with Moses. You know we need to do...let's make a tiny gold cow". That's what they did, they made a tiny gold cow, and I think our natural reactions is "What is wrong with you? Why would you be making a tiny gold cow when God is right there?" And the answer is that they've been enslaved in Egypt for so long, they thought like Egyptians, they didn't think like God's people. And they were doing what the Egyptians had taught them, which is you make physical things to represent your gods.

They weren't necessarily looking for new gods, okay, this was not a rejection of Yahweh, it was not a rejection of the God of Israel, it was a desire for that God to go with them when they left the mountain. They wanted God's power to be present in their camp, they wanted God's presence to be manifest wherever they went and so they said, "Let's make a thing and then we'll ask God and, hopefully, he'll show up and will be present with us, he'll make his presence known and his power felt through this thing that we've made."

Meanwhile, Moses on top of the mountain getting the big 10, right? And one of those big 10 has something to say about images, doesn't it? Where God says: "Don't make them, don't make images." Now, it's not even just a generic "Don't make images", its specific: "Don't make images of me. Don't do that, don't make physical things to represent me." Why? Because he's already



done it. God's already made a physical thing through which he wants to pour out his power and his presence in the creation he's made, God has already done it. It's you. That's who we are, that's what it means to be the image of God. We're the physical representatives of God in creation. And God created us, he crafted us, so they could pour out his power and his presence into creation through us. That's incredible. Can I get an amen on that?

You know, we go hungering for meaning and significance, because we feel like we're made for more. And we grab a hold of almost anything to try to fill this void that we know, there's something more and more meaningful that I should be experiencing, there's something more significant that I should be part of. And we go looking for anything, and nothing we've ever grabbed a hold of to give us meaning and significance can hold a candle to the reality. You were crafted to be the physical representative of God in creation. And that physical word is actually important. Sometimes people kind of get hung up on me like: "Yeah, physical. I'm okay with "represented", but physical?" Yeah, the physical parts are important. A tselim, an image was always a physical thing, was always said you could see it, was always thought it was right there. And God created us, of course, and in a lot of ways, yes, we're similar to angels, we have a lot of the same characteristics, but you and I have one thing that angels don't have. What is it? Bodies.

Angels, sometimes, appear physically but it's not their normal way of existing, it's a temporary thing, but for us, we're in bodies. And the reality is that when Jesus comes back, if you read scripture, it's very clear that when Jesus comes back and begins to make everything new. He gives us new bodies. Anybody ready for the trade in? Because according to Scripture those bodies don't hurt, they don't break and you don't wake up in the morning and they take a couple of jolts of coffee before you can really get 'em moving. I'm ready, I'm ready for the new model, but the point is there's a new model, there is a new body because God's going to make all things new, we're going to get there in a couple weeks. We're made to be physical because that's what God intended us for, he created this thing that we call creation and he said, "I want to make sure that my kingdom is experienced there. I want to make sure that my power and my presence is manifest there and I'm going to make something to do that." And that's you.

There's good news and bad news here. Which one do you want first? Good, all right. Good news. You matter. You matter in a way that you can't imagine to God. You're valuable. You're his image. It's who you are, it's what you are and it's better than that, it's not just that you matter but is this. How much you matter has nothing to do with what you do, has nothing to do with your performance, it has nothing to do with how well you check off the boxes of religion, or how poorly you do because your value can't go down based on your behavior. Your value is inherent in who you are, is what God made you to be. You are the image of God.

And we struggle with that, we try to talk ourselves out of it in a 1,000 different ways. We feel like I have to earn God's love, I have to earn God's approval, I have to earn God's behavior. Maybe if I just get all these things in order, if I get my life in shape, then God will love me. No. God already loves you, God looks at you and says you are of inestimable value. You are more valuable than you can imagine just because of who I made you to be, but we try to talk ourselves out of it. We will use language to talk ourselves out of it, they see that we say things like this we say you know human beings bear the image of God, how of you have ever heard that? Or that we reflect the image of God, heard that one? None of those are biblical, you cannot find anywhere in God's Word where it says that we have, hold, bear, carry, reflect, anything the image of God. What Scripture says is we are the image of God. It's a simple black-and-white fact. That's what we are.

And honestly, most translations I struggle with, in 26, it says, "And God said, let us make mankind in our image." And that word "in" kind of suggests that, again, in this similarity may be a characteristic something like that, but the Hebrew preposition there is often translated "as" in other places. In which case what God would be saying, and I think this makes more sense in the context, what God's saying is "Let us make human beings as our image." You don't have it, you don't hold it, you don't carry, you don't bear it, you don't reflect. It's what you are. You matter because of who you are, you don't earn God's love, you don't earn your value. God looks at you and says: "You are more valuable than you can possibly imagine to me". That's good news, right? We don't have to earn it, we don't have to win it, we just are "it".



We don't have to look at ourselves when I mess up and feel like I've lost my value, I've lost my worth. No, not possible. That's the good news. Bad news? It's true of everybody else, which means that when we treat people like they don't count, when we are unkind, when we lack grace, when we lack mercy we're mean-spirited, we're being selfish and we look at what we can get from them, rather than how we can serve them. We're doing that to people who are of inestimable value, but we're treating them as though they have none, and I think most of us.

I know I am guilty of it hundreds of times a day. And I preach something like this and I reflect on it during the week and I realize, you know, I love my wife, and I think I treat my wife pretty good compared to my neighbor, compared with that guy I saw in the mall but you know what? I don't treat her in a way that is right, and good, and consistent with the true value that she has as the image of God.

If somebody handed you the Mona Lisa, you'd treat that thing with respect, wouldn't you? Because it's valuable, but its value is nothing compared to the value of the people that we interact with on a daily basis, and yet we don't treat them as though they have that kind of value. Maybe, the Holy Spirit even right now is beginning to go: "Yeah, you know what? You don't treat your wife in a way that's consistent with the value that she has in my eyes" or "yeah, you know what? You don't treat your husband in the way that's consistent with the value that he actually has in God's economy." Or maybe you look at your kids and you go, "Definitely not treating them in a way that's consistent". Or your neighbor, your boss, your employee, your parents, siblings, that guy in traffic who insist on cutting you off. See, we treat those people like what you do has a huge impact on the value you have, and therefore the way that I'll treat you, but that is not the way God sees it.

So, it may be that even now as you begin to contemplate this it's a little bit of a scary truth. This is the truth that will mess you up, gloriously. You've never interacted with somebody who's not of nearly infinite value in God's eyes. so it may be that you have some work to do this afternoon, some apologies that need to be made, some confessions that need to be given, some forgiveness that needs to be asked, some reorientation of the ways that you think and act towards people, that God's allowed into your sphere of influence.

I know that there's, sometimes, there's a part of us that reacts to that kind of challenges goes, "Okay, yeah, I get that. But you understand what they've done to me, do you understand what it would cost for me to make that apology, understand what it would take for me to try to reconcile that relationship, to take that step. Do you know what they've done and you know what it would cost? God, would you really want me to do that? Do you get it?" And God says, "Do I get what it costs to reconcile somebody who's done wrong to me?" and he goes, "Yeah, I do."

We're taking communion today, and in communion what we find is the proof positive that we worship a God who knows exactly what it costs, to ascribe value, to reconcile, to draw back into a story people who have done tremendous harm against him, tremendous wrong against him and yet, in spite of all that we did, he still looked at and he said: "I love you. Do you know how much I love you?" Jesus took the bread before he went to the cross, he broke it. He also gave thanks for it. That's incredible, he gave thanks for it.

He gave thanks for the opportunity, so he could say this is my body, it's broken for you, this is how much I love you, this is how valuable you are to me, your behavior hasn't changed it. It's who you are because of what I made you to be. My body is broken for you. And he hold up the cup and he gave thanks for the opportunity to demonstrate the depth of his value for us, the depth of his love for us. He said, "This is my blood, it's poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Simply by faith in me, come back to your father, come back into the story that you were written for."

As the ushers come forward now, I'm going pray and they're going pass out the pieces and just encourage you to take a piece of bread, take of the cup, spend a few moments just going before God and thanking him for what it cost him and his willingness to do it to bring you back into a story, to prove how much he values us, how much he loves us.



And then, when you're free and your spirit of that, just go ahead and take the elements, and then maybe offer up a prayer to god this is, "God would you show me what I need to do today to value others in some small way that reflects how much you love me." Would you pray with me?

Jesus, we thank you. It's hard for us to wrap our heads around this truth that you put on the very first page of your word that we were made with purpose and significance. That's astounding. We are made as your image, incredible privilege to be the instrument by which you demonstrate your power and your presence in the world. Thank you for making us valuable, improving how much you value us, how much you love us by being willing to die for us. Take our sins upon your shoulders, to rise again from the dead, to set us free to rejoin the story that we were written to be part of. Give us a sense of how much you love us and speak to us about how we are called now to love and value others in a similar vein. Thank you for the broken body and the shed blood. We partake of it as your people, in Jesus name. Amen.

