

People Are People

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[0 : 0 0] Tonight we are at the second last part of the series we've been doing for the past few weeks. Doctoring for Mission will be bringing this to a conclusion next Sunday evening all being well.

And as we've been saying throughout these last number of weeks, the aim of this series is to think through some key theological truths that will help us as we seek to share the gospel. The people out there in Carlyway desperately need to hear about Jesus.

There is nobody in Carlyway who can tell them about Jesus except us. We are here as Christians, this congregation and our neighbours beside us, we are the only people who can share this good news with the people who need to hear it.

So we've got such an important job to do and yet it's daunting. And it's not something that any of us find easy. And that's why we need to saturate our minds and our hearts with the amazing biblical doctrines that empower us as we seek to share our faith.

Tonight our title is People Are People. And I'm going to read a text from Genesis 1 but we'll be referring back to the passages that Phil read for us. 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.

[1 : 2 1] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. I once knew a man who lived a long, long way from here, he was in another part of the country and he passed away several years ago.

He was one of my favourite people. He was full of fun, friendly, kind, enthusiastic, great company. He was the kind of person who just lit up every single room that he went into. He was a wonderful person to be around.

I also knew a man who lived in the same place, who was a convicted criminal, who had served time in prison, a heavy drinker, reckless with money, a womanizer, probably racist and definitely didn't care if he offended people.

He was somebody that you knew you had to be careful around. What would have happened if these two people had met? Well that would have been impossible because they're both the same person.

And I'm sure you can probably think of people you know who you could describe in the same kind of way. One of the biggest paradoxes that we will ever encounter is one that we come across multiple times every single day.

[2 : 5 6] People. People are an astonishing mixture of astonishing things. They can be the source of immense joy, they can be the source of awful pain.

They can accomplish the most incredible things. They can do the most awful things. They can be so beautiful. They can be so horrible.

People are amazing. People are appalling. Perhaps most of all people are perplexing. But that's what they are. People are people.

And as we seek to share our faith, that's a reality that we must never forget. It's so important that we remember that people are people.

Recognising that immediately guards us against two pitfalls that we can easily fall into in regard to our evangelism. On the one hand we can make the mistake of thinking that people are projects that we can fix.

[4 : 0 0] But we must avoid that because that mindset can lead to an unhealthy kind of evangelism that's kind of a bit mechanical, that can easily come across as patronising and might even be in danger of being manipulative. We can't look at people and think, oh there's a project I'm going to work on.

But on the other hand we can easily think that people are write-offs that no one can fix. Now that doesn't lead to unhealthy evangelism. That leads to no evangelism.

We've got to remember that people are not projects. We've got to remember that people are not write-offs. People are people.

But what exactly does that mean? What exactly are we saying when we say that? Well this brings us onto the fascinating subject of biblical anthropology.

That's just basically the biblical description of what the human race is, what we as humans are. Biblical anthropology is a fascinating subject and this is the area of the Bible that gives us the answers that we need as we try to make sense of the people that we see around us and in fact as we try to make sense of the person who looks back at us when we stand in the mirror because we can be so confused by the people around us and even by ourselves.

[5 : 3 3] But the amazing thing about the Bible is that you only have to read the first three pages of the Bible to discover why it is that the homeless person on the street who's a hopeless drug addict and who's made so many terrible mistakes in their lives still needs and deserves help.

You discover why spending £250,000 on a terminal cancer patient is worth every single penny. Why a child adored by her parents chooses to smoke even though she's been told a thousand times not to do it.

Why domestic abuse is both abundant and abhorrent, why getting as much money as possible is sickening and satisfying.

It just depends on who's getting it. The Bible explains all of these things because it tells us that humanity is incredibly special and it tells us that humanity is badly broken.

The sense of to that biblical anthropology is the teaching that really lies at the heart of what we are as humans. The fact that we have been made in the image of God as the first chapter of Genesis makes so clear.

[6 : 5 9] What we need to recognise is that this is really what makes humans humans. This is our key defining feature. Some of you may have heard of Herman Bavinck, because I'm a very well known theologian.

He was Dutch, he lived kind of end of the 19th century, early 20th century, he died in 1920-ish. He made a really helpful point because he said, when it comes to the image of God, humanity doesn't just bear the image of God, humanity is the image of God.

That's exactly what we are. Nothing else in creation is God's image bearer. Humanity has a position of unique privilege and unique responsibility.

Humanity in other words is special in a way that no other part of creation is. It's really important that we understand that, what it means to bear the image of God.

To help us, over the years theologians have observed that this image bearing can be thought of in terms of two elements or aspects.

[8 : 14] At a broad level you have what's known as the structural element of bearing God's image. Now basically that's to do with the nature and capacities that we have as humans.

And the key point is that the nature and capacities that we have reflect the nature and capacities of God. So humans can think, humans can communicate, we can relate to others, we can make decisions, we can determine right from wrong, we can carry responsibility and we can appreciate beauty and we can do all these things in a way that no other part of creation can.

If you want to prove that just go and try and find a sheep that's looking at the sunset. You won't. And the key point is that all of these capabilities are what makes humanity different from animals, plants and minerals.

And the key thing is that it's God-like qualities that makes us unique. It's God-like qualities that make us special.

So you've got that broad structural element. Our capabilities reflect the capabilities and nature of God in a certain sense. Then you have what's known as a kind of narrower functional element.

[9 : 40] So some theologians say broad and narrow, some say structural, functional. Basically the good way to think about it is structured as kind of what we're made of, what our capacities are. Function is then how we use these capacities, what we do.

So you can maybe say structural, what we have, functional, what we do, how we use these capacities. And again theologians have summed these up under some headings.

The three headings that tend to be used are the terms knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Anyone that can remember their catechism from long ago will speak about how man's been made in God's image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

And these three terms are taken from Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4, as you can see in the screen. We put on the new self which has been renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

So you can see the link there between knowledge and the image of God. And same here, to put on the new self created after the likeness of God in through righteousness and holiness. So it's from these verses that we can make the summary that the way we function is in terms of knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

[10 : 48] In other words, the structural capacities that God has endowed upon humanity are to be used to know Him. Now in a biblical sense knowledge means to be in a relationship, an intimate relationship with Him.

Our capacities are to be used to know God. Our capacities are to be used to be like God. That's what we mean when we talk about righteousness, conforming to God's standards.

And our structural capacities are to be used to be for Him. So to know Him, to be like Him and to be for Him. That's what we mean when we talk about holiness being set apart, dedicated for God with purpose and purity.

So to put it all another way, if you think back long ago to the olden days when phones weren't smart and imagine that you had never seen the little box with a dial and the headset on top of it.

You saw it in the house, plugged into a wall and you asked the person, what is that? And they say, it's a phone. And you would say, okay, what does it do? And they would say, it phones.

[11 : 59] It's a phone and it phones. Now pretend that you're the phone and you're seeing a human for the first time and you ask your phone friend, what is it? And they say, it's the image of God. What does it do? It bears God's image.

That fundamentally is what a human is. Now you might say, Thomas, that all sounds really kind of mystical and it actually sounds a bit weird, but it actually makes perfect sense of the way that you speak and the way that every single human speaks.

If someone asks you, what do you do? Have you ever said, I find food, I avoid danger, I sleep and I reproduce? Of course you don't.

But when you answer that question by saying, I'm devoted to my family, I work as a teacher and I love going to the theatre, when you say that you have just described activities that nothing else in creation does in the same way.

And that's because you've described things that only a God like being can do. That's what makes humanity so beautiful and amazing.

[13 : 19] And that's what makes you so special and precious. God created us in his image. That makes humanity amazing.

But that's only half the story of biblical anthropology. Genesis chapter 3 tells us that humanity's rebelled against God. The result is that sin has intruded into our experience. That's had a pervasive effect on what we are.

So at a structural level, if we go back to our two elements, at a structural level, the core elements remain. In other words, sin has not turned us into a lesser type of species or a new category of creature.

We still have the ability to think, to relate, to communicate, to decide, to admire. But now these have been damaged and distorted by sin. So our thinking is confused. Our relationships are strained. Our communication is hampered. Our decisions are skewed.

And our admiration is misplaced. The consequence of that is that the way we function has been spoiled. So instead of knowing God in an intimate relationship with him, we're alienated from him.

[14 : 29] We're now in a position of enmity. Instead of conforming to God's righteousness, we fall short and miss the mark of sinners. Instead of living for him as holy people, we're now polluted with sin and we live for idols.

So if you imagine the old phone again, it's now rusty, damaged and crackly. Is it still a phone? Yes.

Can it perform its function properly? No. Unless it's fixed. Humanity is in exactly the same situation. We're still God's image bearers.

We still have the structural components in place. We're still unique and special. But now all of that's been distorted and damaged by sin. And as a result, our functioning has become the very opposite of what God created us to do.

Tragically, instead of using our God-given capabilities to reflect him, we're using them to reject him.

[15 : 44] And that is what makes sin so awful. And it's really important that we recognize that. The thing that makes sin so awful is that we sin as image bearers.

That's why a harsh is not a sinner because it's not an image of God bearer. But we are. And when we sin, we are taking the qualities and the privileges that make us so special.

And we're using them to spit in God's face. Even though he's the one who gave them all to us.

And all of that means that now humanity is still made in the image of God, but we are now badly distorted. And that's why you can look at people around you and see beautiful things and awful things.

That's why some of you who are teachers can get so much joy from some of your pupils. And you can get so much abuse from some of them.

[16 : 51] That's why some of you might work with people, some of whom would take a bullet for you. Some of whom seem to just take any opportunity to make your life a misery.

That's why we get hurt. That's why life can be incredibly hard.

When people who should be so beautiful can behave so, so badly. And we have to look at ourselves and realise that we're affected in the same way.

You look in the mirror and you see the handy work of God. But at the same time you see somebody who's been damaged by the destructive power of sin. And that's why all of this makes sense.

And I really hope that you can see that you ask anybody, anybody, ask them, deep down, do you feel like you're special? They're almost certainly going to say yes.

[17 : 57] But if you ask them deep down, do you believe that you're perfect? Then as long as they've got even a fragment of self-awareness, they're going to say no.

We all know that we're special. We all know that we're broken. And one of the things that I think proves this is if you imagine that you're standing in the middle of a big, busy city, and you can hear sirens wailing through the air.

All of us who grew up in Lewis, well, I don't know, maybe you're not like me, but because it was quite rare to see sirens, I always was really excited when I still am really excited when I see a fire engine, an ambulance, a police car, lights on, sirens going.

It's quite exciting because it's quite a rare thing. That's why I also get excited when I see trains, combine harvester and double-decker buses, all these things that we've been deprived of growing up in Lewis.

For many people, they're probably fed up of hearing the noise of sirens in cities and towns. But if you imagine hearing that noise of a siren ringing out through Glasgow or Inverness or whatever, you ever wondered, why is that siren making a noise?

[19 : 19] Why is that siren ringing out? Why do we need them? And why are they used? It's for two reasons. It's because bad things happen.

Bad things happen in a world that's been broken by sin. That's the first reason. The second reason is because the people who are caught up in whatever's going wrong are incredibly precious.

That's the only reason why something's an emergency, because something bad has happened and the people involved are precious. That's just reflecting biblical anthropology so clearly.

People are people. That tension between beauty and brokenness is captured very powerfully in the two passages that we read.

Let's look first at Psalm 139. You've got these beautiful verses in the middle where David speaks about the fact that he is the handy work of God. You formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's room.

[20 : 34] I praise you because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. So you've got this wonderful description of just how special David is as God's craftsmanship. But then just a few verses later, David is pleading with God to slay the wicked.

That kind of language that you get in this Psalm and in many other Psalms, it doesn't sit very comfortably with us today. There's a sense in which it's right that it doesn't, because since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil has moved to a different level.

That's why we do not wrestle with flesh and blood today in the same way that David wrestled and fought against flesh and blood enemies in the Old Testament era. So things are a little bit different for us today.

But if we can try and put our minds back into the days that David lived and try to imagine a militia gathering in your community and they wanted to steal every man, or sorry, kill every man, abduct every woman, burn every home, and starve every child, that gives you a better picture of what it would have been like to face enemies in David's day.

That makes it easier to understand why you would use words like this. The key point I want to emphasize though is that in terms of humanity, these verses that are before you on the screen are giving you a very powerful picture of that tension between the amazing beauty and the tragic brokenness of humanity.

[22 : 09] The fearfully and wonderfully made person in verse 14 is a person. The bloodthirsty wicked people of verse 19 are people.

At no point did these verses describe anything other than people. The same tension is seen in James chapter 3.

These verses are amazing. James recognizes so much that's true of the human condition. I'll just read it. He says, We stumble in many ways. If anyone is not stumbling, what he says is a perfect man able also to bridle his whole body.

For every kind of beast and bird of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It's a restless evil full of deadly poison. With it we bless our father, our lord and father, and with it we curse people made in the likeness of God.

From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing, my brothers, these things ought not to be so. James is using the example of speech and he's showing that we're made in the image of God.

[23 : 23] We've got the amazing privilege and opportunity to bless God, and yet the very same tongues can curse people, image-bearers that God himself has made.

And the result is that humanity is beautiful, we're able to bless God, but we're also fragile. We can stumble in many kinds of ways. We're complicated. Even our tongues are impossible to control.

We're exposed because we can so easily be hurt by the words of other people and we're even deadly. You've got this description of our words, our tongues, as being full of deadly poison.

We can cause so much damage in other people's lives. And James catches it all so poignantly when he says, brothers, these things ought not to be so.

All of this combines to give us a biblical anthropology that's in constant tension. And I'm going to summarize it in four statements. Now, these are just a selection, there's loads more that could be added, but this just summarizes it a wee bit.

[24 : 28] Humanity is beautiful but broken, fragile but harsh, precious but difficult, simple but complex.

Or if you want to imagine an image in your mind, think of a broken vase. Made beautiful, now broken, fragile and delicate, and yet it's got edges that can wound you or someone else so easily.

It's precious, but the bits are scattered all over the place. It was made for a simple and wonderful purpose, but the task of putting it back together again is huge.

We need to recognize that all of our experience as people is shaped by this beauty, brokenness, tension.

Often the reality is that it feels like the brokenness part is dominant. So if you look at the news headlines, then they're going to contain far more brokenness than beauty.

[25 : 35] And the fact that people spend so much time to make themselves look and feel more beautiful is that feeling broken becomes a lot more easily to us than feeling beautiful.

The amazing message of the Gospel is that in God's eyes you've never stopped being beautiful. And because of that, he's not going to leave you broken.

He sent his son Jesus to come and put things right to do that amazing work of restoration. That's what the Gospel is all about, that Jesus has come to fix a humanity that's broken.

God doesn't look at us and think, well, they're too far gone. He looks at us and says, they're still beautiful and I want to save them. And the most amazing part of it all is that for people to be fixed, Jesus had to be crushed.

And Jesus did that because the whole reason he's come is to take a broken humanity and make us his beautiful bride.

[26 : 42] That's the Gospel. That's what makes the Gospel so amazing. Our job is to share that message with the people around us.

And as we've been saying all along, that's a job that we all find daunting and so easy to conclude and think, well, I can't do it. Someone else has got to do it for me. But you can do it. You absolutely can.

And one of the key reasons that you can do it is because the people that you're going to share the Gospel with are people. And if we remember that, I really believe that it can help us overcome our fear and our hesitation to talk about Jesus.

But for that to happen, we've got to remember that people are people. And that means that we have got to remember both sides of that diagram.

We've got to remember both sides of the dotted line. Jesus did that. He recognized the beauty and brokenness of humanity.

[27 : 52] You can see that just magnificently in Mark chapter 3. Jesus entered the synagogue and there was a man there with a withered hand. They watched Jesus to see if he'd heal him on the Sabbath so that they could accuse him.

And he said to the man with a withered hand, come here. He said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent and he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

And he said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out and his hand was restored. Here Jesus saw the brokenness of humanity both in the suffering of the man and in the cruelty of the crowd.

He also saw the beauty and preciousness of humanity. It's from brokenness that he's come to restore us. He grieved because of the brokenness. He graciously heals because of the preciousness.

His anger arises because when it comes to people, this is not how things should be at all. At every step of his mission, Jesus knew that people are people and we need to think the way Jesus thought.

[29 : 02] In other words, when we look at the people around us, we need to remember both sides of that dotted red line on the slide. So I want you just to kind of mentally cover one side of it and I want you to just look at the right hand side of the line.

Because we've got to remember that the people around us are broken, harsh, difficult and complex. Now you might be thinking to yourself, well if that's true then I'm never going to evangelise.

But I want you to think about this a little bit more because that right hand side is telling you two crucial things. It's telling you straight away that you can't fix everything. That's why people can never be projects. The situation is way more complicated than that.

And that's why evangelism is only ever possible in the power of the God who is God. You don't need to put every piece back together. You don't need to answer every question. You don't actually even need to find out if the person comes to faith at all.

And that's not to discourage you, that's to liberate you. Because we just try to say what we can. We have to leave all the rest to God.

[30 : 08] So it's telling us that we can't fix everything. But that right hand side of that diagram is telling you something else that's crucial. It's telling you that the people around you, the people that you work with, the people that you live with, the people that you live across the road from, they need your evangelism.

They need it. To Jesus, brokenness, harshness, difficultness and complexity did not put him off.

It threw him in. And that's reminding us that as you read down the right hand side of that slide, you are not reading a list of reasons to stay quiet.

You are reading a list of compelling reasons to take a deep breath, to take a step of faith and speak.

But if you only look at the right hand side, then that step of faith seems crippling scary. That's why you also need to remember what is on the left. The broken, harsh, difficult, complex people around you are also beautiful.

[31 : 31] They're the craftsmanship of God. And that is why they must never, ever be written off. Think of the person in your life who gets on your nerves the most.

They're made in the image of God. They're the work of his hands. They're beautiful. They're also fragile, vulnerable and exposed to so many dangers.

They are precious, more valuable than they've ever dared imagine. And they're simple because they're just another one of the things that you are as well.

They're people made by God, made for God. And when you point them to Jesus, you're simply pointing them to the place where they belong more than anywhere else.

Both sides of that line are crucial. The right hand tells you that it's not easy and you can't fix it all. And that's something that we've got to know. The left hand side tells you that trying to speak to your neighbour, your friend, your colleague is so, so worth it.

[32 : 48] But there's one final thing. People are people. And that's what they're like. That includes you as well.

That means that as you share the Gospel, you need to be ready to acknowledge that you're broken. You need to guard against any tendencies that you might have to be harsh.

You need to expect that not everything is going to be perfect. Difficulties might arise along the way and you need to remember that you are complicated too. So please don't panic if you discover that you're carrying a whole web of strengths and weaknesses into any conversations that you have.

God has never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever used a perfect person to point someone to Jesus.

Every single missionary that Jesus has sent out has been imperfect. And yet that's the kind of people that God uses. So you've got to remember the stuff down the right.

[33 : 55] You've also got to remember the stuff down the left. You've got to remember that you are beautiful. You really are beautiful.

You're beautiful in God's eyes. You've made with wonderful qualities. And even though the battle against sin continues, God the Holy Spirit lives within you as a Christian.

He is transforming you. You might feel like your words are messy and muddled, but every single time you speak the Gospel, the words that pass your lips are carrying the most beautiful message that has ever been heard.

In a world that is so full of brutal cursing, your trembling voice is carrying the words of eternal life.

You need to remember that you're fragile. That means that sharing your faith might leave you feeling exhausted. It might leave you feeling guilty when half an hour later you remember all the things that you wish you'd said.

[35 : 00] It might leave you feeling very worried thinking, I've probably made a complete hash of that and I've probably put them off for life. The moments when you share your faith might be the moments when you feel at your most fragile.

Never forget that God's treasure, the treasure of the Gospel message is stored where?

It's stored in fragile jars of clay. You must remember that you're precious.

So you're not doing this as God's slave, you're not doing this as kind of like God like come on finally and wait your way to share your faith. You need to do it otherwise I'm not going to be impressed. You're not doing that at all. You're doing that as God the Father's child.

You're not doing that as Christ's ambassador, as the Holy Spirit's home. You might feel like your words are rubbish, but as the Father holds you securely, as Jesus stands right beside you, as the Holy Spirit guides you and as the whole of heaven watches on, your words are priceless.

[36 : 22] And last of all you need to remember that you're simple. And that's not an insult, it's a relief. It's a relief because it means that to share your faith you don't need to become a superhero.

You don't need to become a genius. You don't need to become an evangelistic machine. You just need to be you.

The beautiful fragile precious simple person that God has made you to be.

You love Jesus, I know you do. You need Jesus and I know that you know that. You long for others to come to know Jesus too. They are just people like you.

And you know all these things that we've described there, you know, you don't need to give people like a long, long speech about what the gospel means. You know that all of the beauty, preciousness of the words that you convey can be captured in just a few words like, I want you to know that the best thing in my life is knowing Jesus.

[37 : 36] And I'd love for you to come to know him as well. Just one sentence. One sentence that God can take and use in an amazing way.

People are people. They're broken. They're beautiful.

All that they need is a simple, ordinary, not particularly impressive disciple of Jesus to talk to them.

They need a person just like them. That means that they need a person just like you.

Amen. Father, help us to see people the way you see them.

[38 : 48] Amen.