

Creation Ordinances, Creation Offices

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0:00] Well, I'd like us tonight to turn back to Genesis chapter 2, and I'm going to read verses 1-3 as we start. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Now tonight we are continuing our series that's called The Real Us.

And as we began this series, we noticed that in our world today, and we've said this every week, that there's a great emphasis and a good emphasis on talking about the real you.

Thinking about our sense of identity, our sense of self, our individuality. And in lots of ways that's a good thing. We know that in some ways that can be a bad thing and an unhealthy thing, but we want to say that in lots of ways that's a good thing.

We want to think about who we really are. It's a positive step to think about that. But it's our conviction that people are looking for the answer in the wrong place.

[1:10] And it's our conviction and our claim that actually it's only going to be in the Bible that we are really going to discover who we are. And one of the wonderful things that we're discovering is that in the Bible, the emphasis is not so much on the individuality that we see dominant in our own society at this cultural moment.

But instead, it's on the collective identity that we share. And the Bible is teaching us about the real us. And so we're thinking this through. And in many ways, we're thinking all about humanity and various aspects of our nature and our identity and our purpose.

And this is the topics that we're looking at. And this is fast turning into the worst planned sermon series that I've ever done. It's meant to be six parts. I don't even know how many parts we're on, but it's not six.

But the important thing is not so many how many parts we're looking at, but what we're talking about. We've been looking at the creation of humanity, the nature of humanity, purpose of humanity. We're going to talk about humanity as the image of God, humanity as male and female, humanity as the blessed covenant creature.

We are at this point at the moment. And the difficulty is that the more you look at the Bible, just the more awesome stuff you find. And there's always a bit too much to get through in one evening.

[2:26] But that's okay. It's all stuff that we need to learn and we are in no rush. So we are thinking about the purpose of humanity. And again, we want to come back to the fact that that's something that actually, that it's so easy for people not to think about.

But it's the most obvious question of all. We stand in the mirror. We should be asking the question, what am I for? What are we for? And what should we be doing? And what should we aim for?

What is our purpose? And deep down, all of us long to find the answer to that question. And so we've been looking at that in general terms. A couple of weeks ago, we noted that it's summed up beautifully in the phrase that you find in the shorter catechism, that man's chief end, man's great purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And off the back of that, we've been looking in a little more detail at the teaching that we find in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 that show us more about our purpose.

And that purpose can be summarized under these three headings, creation mandates, creation ordinances, and creation offices. Now that all maybe sounds weird, but these are very, very helpful things for us to think through.

[3 : 38] Last week, we looked at creation mandates. And what we mean by that is that in the opening chapters of the Bible, as we read about God's creation of humanity, there are some specific objectives and activities that humanity is to accomplish.

And the key text was Genesis 1.28. God created humanity male and female and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And we summarized these mandates under the three headings, a dominion mandate, a cultural mandate, and a relational mandate. So humanity is made to carry a responsibility of ruling over the creation.

Now that's not never to be an abusive rule, never to be a cruel or oppressive exercise of authority, but instead it's a position of responsibility, of leadership, of care that God has placed upon humanity over the rest of creation.

There's a cultural mandate. And by that, we're meaning the fact that all the potentials of the world around us are to be cultivated by humanity. And that extends to all areas of life.

[4 : 49] There's so much potential around us, and God wants us to cultivate that potential. And humanity does that in a way that no other part of creation does. And that cultural mandate, all of these, but maybe especially that cultural mandate, reveals the difference between humans and any other part of creation.

And we also saw a relational mandate, that we are made to be relational creatures, and that relationship is between us and God. That relationship is between us as one another.

That relationship between ourselves and the rest of the created world. And even the relationship with ourselves as individuals. That's a crucial part of our purpose, to enjoy all of these relations.

And we said last week that sin has made all of these ugly. So dominion gets abused, whether that's in homes or in businesses or in countries. We see that happening again and again.

We see the threat we have of climate change and stuff like that. All of that's an abuse of that dominion mandate. The cultural mandate is made ugly by sin. And that's where you see all the areas of culture that you find.

[5 : 58] Where we see the best of humanity in art and in literature and in movies and in technology. Where you see the greatest of human achievements. You actually see all of these have a dark side.

And you find all sorts of awful stuff in all of these different places. And the relationship mandate has been made ugly by sin as well. And instead of being at peace with ourselves, we feel a sense of anguish over who we are.

Instead of relating well to the environment around us, we suffer and we toil. Instead of relating well to one another, there's hatred and bitterness. And instead of having a beautiful relationship with God, we've pushed him away.

And we've chased after sin. We are guilty before him. And that relationship has been broken. Sin is making all of these ugly. The gospel makes all of them beautiful.

The gospel restores us to fulfill the purposes that God has for us. To exercise dominion wisely and kindly and courageously. To cultivate the resources that God's given us in a way that honors him.

[7:03] And to restore the relationships that he's made us to have. So that we enjoy the beauty of all of these. So, these creation mandates are all very important. Tonight, well, tonight I was going to do both of these.

I don't know if I'm going to get all the way through. But let's just start. Let's see how we get on. I want us to think about creation ordinances in particular. Now, that's a weird phrase. What do we mean by that?

Well, a creation ordinance is referring to the patterns and structures that are established by God at creation, which are to shape how humanity lives.

And these are to have lasting relevance. Okay, so we're reading about the creation of humanity. Lots of Christians have different views about how to understand and interpret Genesis 1 and 2. Some want to take it literally. Some see it more as actually something that's not giving us specific times and orders, but rather just pointing us in a beautiful way to the fact that God is our creator and that he's establishing humanity to have a special function before him.

And in that establishment of humanity as unique and special, there are particular structures set in place for us. So here's a quote from a theologian called Verne Poitras.

[8:22] He says, A creation ordinance is a moral or social structure established at the time of creation of mankind. And we would argue that these are established then and their relevance continues now.

And these are all drawn from Genesis 1 and 2, and there's usually four creation ordinances identified. They are procreation, marriage, work, and Sabbath.

And these can actually be put into two pairs. So we just separate them off slightly. And these two you could in many ways sum up under the heading of family. And the two belong together side by side in that.

And these two you could sum up as kind of work and rest. And those two sit side by side as a pair.

One of the big emphases of the Sabbath is that concept of rest. So we've got these two pairs, four creation ordinances, and these key structures are being established. And you can draw it all from Genesis 1 and 2.

[9:28] So there we have Genesis 1, 28. There we have procreation. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth. You can see it very, very clearly. Then Genesis 2, 1.

I'm just going through the order of the verses rather than the order of the list I had a second ago. You have the establishment of the Sabbath day. And there's a big emphasis on rest there. The Sabbath day, the day of rest.

God rests from the work that he's done. Then you move down into Genesis 2, 15. You see that the Lord God took the man, put him in the Garden of Eden to work and to keep it.

So there we have work established there. And then at the end of the chapter, we see the establishment of marriage. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

And all of that is describing to us the creation ordinance of marriage. Now, these actually relate to the creation mandates that we looked at last week.

[10:29] And in lots of ways, there's overlap. But the two do relate together. And I was thinking about how do you kind of summarize the difference between these two categories that I'm giving you.

I want to suggest maybe that on this side, the creation mandates are kind of giving us some overarching goals, overarching objectives for humanity. And then on this side, the ordinances are the structures being set up through which these goals are reached.

So on that side, mandates, you've got overarching goals. On that side, you've got the structures that are ordering day-to-day life and living. And what I want us to see is that these work together.

The ordinances facilitate the mandates. So these ordinances are helping to facilitate the creation mandates. So, for example, dominion, we're to rule over the whole earth.

And so the multiplication of the human race allows that to happen. And you've seen that in history. History has proven that the human race has spread over all the nations and extended its spheres of influence.

[11:40] And labor and rest here, you know, working, resting, that helps to fulfill the cultural mandate. You think of all the potential in the world that there is.

It's by working and resting appropriately that all of that is achieved. So all the advancements in technology, medicine, art, literature, music, everything, it's all because people have worked.

And that's fulfilling the cultural mandate. I've just realized I've put all these a bit in the wrong order because my arrows are going to cross over. But the relational mandate, obviously, with marriage, but there's also the relationship between parents and children as well.

That's a key part of it. The point is that all of these are overlapping and intersecting. I also want to suggest that the pairs that I set before you are giving us a pattern in terms of the structures of life, are giving us a pattern of potential.

Sorry for my spelling. That should have been an E. Potential and protection. And these two things sit by side. Potential and protection.

[12:46] So if you think about it, you know, procreation, the growth of the human race, is releasing the vast potential. Of the human race as children are born.

And that's just an amazing advancement and release of protection. And marriage is intended to place protection around that.

So unlike the animal kingdom, you know, the male of the human species is not just to go around and generate offspring wherever he's strong enough to do so.

That's not the way God wants it to be. Humans are completely different from the animal kingdom in that regard. And marriage is established as this protection around that ordinance of procreation, so that as children are born, they are nurtured.

As a mother bears children, she's not abandoned to do that on her own. But that marriage sets a protection around that. Same with work.

[13:50] That's releasing potential. And again, we've said that. That all that you do in your work, whatever your job is, whatever your job used to be, if you're now retired, all of that is contributing to just bringing forward the fulfillment of the potential of the world around us.

And you see that in so many magnificent ways. It applies to every single role we have. We're working to fulfill and maximize that great potential.

But the concept of Sabbath rest provides protection for that. Because what's going to happen if you work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, and just try to fulfill more, more, more, more, more potential without ever stopping?

Well, you kill yourself. Or at least you make yourself ill. And so resting each week protects that. So you see that kind of balance of potential and protection.

All of it's teaching us that God's just establishing beautiful structures, setting these beautiful structures in place to shape the way that we live.

[14:58] And all of that, all of that is so that we can flourish. And this is something I want us to come back to, is that, and we've said this before, that a key part of God's purpose for us is that He wants you all to flourish.

But you're going to flourish, but you have to remember, and we have to remember, that we are finite. We're not infinite. We're not limitless.

We're not all powerful. We all have limits. And so the flourishing and the finitude of humanity stand side by side.

And so we flourish in our families, in our roles, as male and female, husbands, wives, parents, children, brothers, sisters. We flourish in the achievements of our work.

But within all of these, our finite dependence is constantly before us. In the most obvious way of all, nobody, no human individual, we can't procreate on our own.

[16:03] That cannot happen individually in isolation. There's that inescapable interdependence between two, between male and female in that happening.

And we can't keep on laboring without rest. And our flourishing and our finitude stands side by side. All of this is part of the structures that God is establishing for humanity.

And it's teaching us two massively important lessons for us. And that's helping us to reveal why these have been established. And it's helping us to understand our purpose.

And the two lessons are this. God wants humanity to survive. And God wants humanity to thrive. Survive and thrive.

God wants both of these things. And that's so crucial. I mean, survive is probably obvious. I mean, he's not creating us for extinction.

[17:03] He creates us because he wants us to live. But it's never just survival. It's more than that. God wants us to thrive in the beautiful world that he's given us.

And to thrive in the opportunities that he's placed before us. And so all of these creation ordinances are there for that twofold purpose.

That we will survive and that we will thrive. And so if we ignore these creation ordinances, then we're risking our survival.

And in some ways that's obvious, particularly for the family pair at the top, for procreation, for marriage, the human race needs offspring.

And the minute there is one generation that refuses to do that, humanity is extinct. And so it's crucial for our survival.

[18:07] But it's also hugely important for the work and rest pair that we have at the bottom. That if we want to survive, if we want to be able to keep working, if we want to be able to keep going, we need to balance work and rest wisely.

And you see that pattern for life that every week, not every year or every 10 years, but every week we need time to rest and recover. And everybody here who's had to go through life, periods in your life where you've had to work what's felt like seven days a week and what maybe has been seven days a week at times, you will know that if that didn't take you to burnout, it would have taken you very, very close to burnout.

And we need that balance in order to survive. So if we ignore these ordinances, we risk our survival. But I also want to emphasize that if we embrace these, then we will thrive.

And this is what's so important for us to recognize in our understanding of what God wants for us, that he wants us to thrive. And these creation ordinances are shaping the stuff that we'll do this week, the normal stuff of life that we do this week, our work and our efforts, our activities, our involvement in the community around us, whether it's paid employment or not paid employment, whatever it is you're doing this week, God has made you to thrive in that.

He's made you to thrive in the opportunities that he's given you, whatever it is we do. And all of it's pointing us towards not just what we do, but who we do it for.

[19:42] And we're doing these for our family. We're doing these for our community. And ultimately, we're doing these for God. All of these are laying the foundation for human flourishing.

And the key point is that the gospel is never just about surviving. It's always about thriving.

Now, that's so, so important for us to see that we can get this wrong at two levels. Sometimes our approach to life, whether we have faith or not, or whatever it might be, our main focus is just on surviving.

We just want to survive our lives. When God wants more than that, God wants us to thrive. He wants every day to be full of joy and adventure and excitement and stimulation and challenge and satisfaction.

That's what God wants for us in our day-to-day lives. Not just surviving this week, but thriving this week. But when we think about the gospel, we've also got to remember that the same is true for eternity.

[20:48] Sin is so serious, and it's placed a huge threat over us, about our eternal survival. And so at one level, the gospel is absolutely about our eternal survival.

The fact that sin is condemning us, and we need our sin to be forgiven if we're going to have eternal life. We have to recognize that. But some people stop there, and they think that following Jesus and trusting in Jesus is like, well, okay, it's probably going to be a bit rubbish, but at least I'll survive.

It's probably going to spoil my life for now, but at least it means I'll get to heaven. That's that view of the gospel that thinks it's just about surviving. It's just about surviving into eternity, and it's like, well, actually, I suppose if you weigh it up, you know, the fact that it'll spoil things just now, at least it'll make up for it when I get to heaven.

That's sort of kind of true, but it's so far from what the gospel is actually about. Because God does not want you to just survive.

He wants you to thrive. To thrive as you go through life now in a way that makes life now a foretaste of what he promises you in heaven.

[22:07] That's what the church is meant to be. The church isn't just meant to be that we come together and we remind ourselves, well, yes, we're surviving into eternity because we've got our ticket to heaven and Jesus is saved. That's not what church is meant to be.

Church is meant to be so much more than that. Church is meant to be the foretaste of the new creation that God has promised for all his people. And so we begin a new week with so much joy and so much love and so much thankfulness and so much purpose as we come together as God's people saved through the blood of Jesus.

And we are reminded of his love and power working in our lives. And he's saying to us, right, here's a new week. Go for it. Live it for me. Thrive. And everything that you do that is wonderful and beautiful and purposeful and meaningful, that's just a taste of the amazing eternity that I'm preparing for you.

God has got so much more for us than just survival. He wants us to glorify and enjoy him forever. That's our purpose.

And all of these creation ordinances are feeding that purpose. And yet it's so easy to view these as restrictive. And so you might think that, you know, well, having children, that's a burden.

[23:26] And it's a lot of worry and it's a lot of tiredness and it's a lot of work. And it can be seen negatively. Getting married, that's boring. You just, why would you do that?

Why would you just, why would you just be one man and one woman together for life? Why would you not want to just go and have lots, you know, meet lots of people, have lots of partners and not be restricted in that sense?

Going to work is a hassle. It's like, oh, I hate my job. I don't want to go there. And I hate my boss and my colleagues are difficult and the people I have to work with drive me mad.

And resting on the Sabbath just seems weird and dull. And so many people view these things negatively today. And yes, sin has affected these negatively.

So there is pain in childbirth and raising children is a lot of work. There are tensions in marriage and it takes a huge amount of commitment. There is toil in our work and we have to strive, strive to press through that.

[24:28] And there is reluctance in our rest because we don't ever want to admit our weaknesses. But we have to get back to the fact that these creation ordinances are part of God's original good creation.

When God created the world, he created it good and he created it to be good. And all of these are pointing us, as we're saying, to the fullness of life and purpose and joy that God is planning for us in his new creation.

All these ordinances are established as the structures that will facilitate human thriving. And please, please, don't ever make the mistake, please don't ever make the mistake of thinking that God wants your life to be rubbish.

That's never true. Now, God doesn't necessarily want your life to be easy because sometimes we will face difficult things and God can use those difficult things to help us to grow and to minister powerfully into our lives.

God's not promising you an easy life, but do not ever think that God wants your life to be dull or restricted or boring. That is never true.

[25:40] That is never true. Following Jesus, following Jesus is the greatest adventure that anyone can have. It's the greatest adventure that anyone can have because God wants us to thrive.

I'm definitely running out of time, so I'm just going to do two more points and then we'll go on to creation offices next week. I want to just say, first of all, that when we look at these creation ordinances, there's an important sense in which these are actually normal structures for humanity.

And this is where it's important for us to recognize something, that in the Bible, there's lots of extraordinary things that happen in the Bible. But before the extraordinary things happen, there's lots of ordinary things that are established.

These are all very ordinary things. These are all things that connect with your life and my life this week. And that is such an important lesson for us when it comes to fulfilling our purpose.

In the Bible, the ordinary actually comes before the extraordinary. There are extraordinary things that are amazing things that God has done at particular times. But before the extraordinary comes the ordinary.

[27:00] The ordinary, the normal stuff, comes first. And that teaches us a huge lesson when it comes to fulfilling our purpose. It's telling you that fulfilling your purpose before God doesn't have to involve something extraordinary or spectacular.

And so yes, God may at times do extraordinary or spectacular things in your life and He's done extraordinary and spectacular things in many people's lives. But never, ever, ever think that it has to be spectacular for you to fulfill your purpose.

It's not true. All of this is reminding us that we can glorify and enjoy God in the most ordinary of weeks. Because most of us are going to have an ordinary week this week.

And most of us had an ordinary week last week. In that ordinariness, we're actually aligning with what God has established in His creation ordinances. And so often we think, you know, other people, they've got such spectacular experiences and they seem to be so close to God and there seems to be so many amazing things that happens in their lives and you think, I'm not like that.

And not many, very little spectacular things have happened in my life and we think, you know, they're the ones who are really pleasing God and they're the ones who are really fulfilling God's purpose. These creation ordinances, the majestic ordinariness of these creation ordinances are reminding us that that's not how God works.

[28:26] He's not got this elite group of spectacular people for whom amazing things happen and they're really fulfilling His purpose. It's not true. The church is full of beautifully ordinary people and beautifully ordinary lives and God is working through them.

And that means that whatever you're doing this week, you can fulfill your purpose of glorifying and enjoying God as you serve Him.

And so I don't know what your Monday morning looks like but if it feels very dull and very ordinary, you need to think about these creation ordinances and thinking, I am fulfilling a God-appointed purpose as I step into work and life again today.

So remember that these are part of normal structures, normal in a really good and healthy way. But the second thing I want to say is this and this is maybe the most important thing I want to say.

And that is that when I talk today about creation ordinances, many people think, I'm sure many people think, well that seems so kind of archaic and it seems maybe a bit dull, it maybe seems a bit backward and there are people who would feel today that biblical convictions regarding procreation and marriage and work on Sabbath, people will think that is backward and weird and we've moved on from that.

[29:50] But I want to say this, I want to say that all of your dreams can be traced back to these creation ordinances.

All of your dreams can be traced back to them. People today think that the kind of ordinances that God establishes in the Bible are going to spoil their lives. The truth is your dreams can be traced back to these.

What kind of dreams do we have? We have the dream of a relationship. We have the dream of falling in love. We have the dream of intimacy.

We have the dream of finding that somebody who will love us and be with us for the rest of our lives. That's that dream that so many people have that finds its origin in the creation ordinance of marriage.

That's everything that marriage is made to provide. We have the dream of a family, a dream of children, a dream of grandchildren, a dream of one generation raising the next.

[31:07] That's a dream that so many people have, many people enjoy, some people go through their whole lives longing for that dream to come and it doesn't come for them. But it's a dream, it's a dream that so many people share and all of it arises from the creation ordinance of procreation.

We dream of success in our career or more widely in our hobbies or maybe in a sport or something.

It doesn't have to be the thing that we're being paid for. All of it's part of our work. We dream of succeeding. We dream of doing well. We dream of bettering ourselves. We dream of accomplishing things whether it's from good grades in school all the way to a promotion or a victory or a success.

We dream of doing well. That all finds its root in the creation ordinance of work. And we dream of holidays. We dream of retirement.

We dream of rest. All of that echoes the ordinance of Sabbath rest. This is all our dreams. All of this is our dreams.

[32 : 18] And so you turn onto page two of the Bible and you find your dreams. dreams being established. And these dreams are shared by everyone. The problem is that for all of these we think that we can have them without God.

And we reject God. So we want the ordinances but we don't want the ordainer. we want the truth. And instead we go our own way and we try to chase these dreams on our own terms.

And and I guess this is really what the gospel is all about because if we chase these dreams on our own terms we might get them.

but we'll only have them for a while. But if we trust in Jesus and if we follow him God is promising us that we will enjoy the fullness of all of these dreams forever.

And that's ultimately the choice between following Jesus or not following Jesus. It's the choice between temporary or forever. God has made us to thrive and to thrive in relationship with him enjoying all the extraordinary benefits that he's pouring out upon us through his son.

[34 : 00] It's just reminding us that following Jesus is amazing and what God wants for you is amazing. And when you see that phrase creation ordinances it might sound like one of the most old-fashioned theological terms you've ever heard.

It's actually talking to you about how utterly brilliant it is to follow Jesus this week and for the rest of our lives. And so that's his call to us. His call to us all is to look to him and follow him.

Amen.