

The Nature Of Humanity Part 2

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- [0:00] I don't think I say this often enough, that you are wonderful, wonderful singers.! When I stand there and hear you singing behind me, it's just a beautiful thing to hear.
- We're going to turn back together to Psalm 8. Let me read again verses 3 and 4. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you've set in place, what is man that you're mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?
- Tonight we're continuing our series that's called The Real Us. And that title comes from the fact that today in our society lots of people want to think and talk about the real you. And all of that ties in with big, big emphases in our culture just now surrounding identity, self, individuality, all that kind of stuff.
- And we've been saying all along that for people today to discover the real you is a good thing. And that's seen in the way in which our society places value on being who you really are, being true to yourself, being the real you.
- That's always seen as a positive step in the world around us. And we did highlight that there are issues with that kind of thinking. And sometimes it can lead to actual big tensions and conflicts in our society.
- [1:13] We're not wanting to focus on that negative side of it. We're wanting to actually say that, yes, to think about the real you is a very good thing to do. It's a very important thing to do.
- But it's something that we've got to get right. And I think in the society around us today, many people are looking for the answer in the wrong place. Because our aim in this series is to discover that it's the Bible and only the Bible that gives us the answer to the question who we really are.
- And in contrast to the individualism that we often see in the world around us, the Bible's emphasis is on the collective identity that we share. In other words, the Bible teaches us all about the real us.
- And that's what we're thinking about. Our series was meant to be in six parts. Creation of humanity, nature of humanity, purpose of humanity. Humanity is the image of God.
- Humanity is male and female. Humanity is a blessed covenant creature. But last week we failed to finish our sermon on part two. So we're here looking at part two B.
- [2:20] Thinking a bit more about the nature of humanity. And as we look at this, we're trying to answer David's question in verse four. What is man?
- That's a question that humanity's always wrestled with. What are we? When you look at yourself in the mirror, what are you looking at? What is a human? What exactly are we?
- And we've been thinking this, we started thinking about this last week. And these are our kind of general headings. Created people, unique and united. And we split our sermon in two just here.
- Last week we looked at that idea of being created people. The fact that a human is a creature and a person. And so as a creature, we are utterly dependent on our creator.
- And that just makes very perfect sense. A creature is always going to be dependent on its creator. But a person has a measure of derived independence.

[3 : 23] So we can think for ourselves and we can make decisions. And we've been endowed with qualities by our creator that enable us to function as persons.

We are created persons. And we saw that that brings several tensions into our experience. So we're flourishing and finite. There's loads of amazing things that we can do. But we are not infinite.

And so when we say that we're finite, what we mean by that is that we are not infinite in the way that God is infinite. And so yes, our soul is never dying.

And our bodies will be raised again for eternity. We're not going to fizzle out like a finite fossil fuel. But more we're finite in the sense that we are by creation limited.

We're not in God's category. We're not as strong as him. So yes, we can flourish. But we must never forget that we're finite. We're limited. We're privileged and responsible.

[4 : 22] That's a balance that runs right through the whole of Scripture. God has poured so many privileges into us. But with those privileges come responsibilities. And of course, the misuse of those responsibilities and the abuse of those privileges has caused so much trouble in the history of the human race.

We are both knowledgeable and learning. We said that when David asked that question, what is man? He's confronted by the fact that looking at the universe, there's so much he doesn't know.

And yet at the same time, as a human, he's the only creature in the universe that can ask that question. And we have a level of knowledge that's remarkable.

And yet there's still so much for us to learn. We're autonomous and dependent. That comes back to the whole emphasis of a created person. A person with a level of autonomy.

But we're never able to function independently of God who creates and sustains us. And we are wonderful and vulnerable. And in many ways, Scripture reveals that to us in the wonderful things that people do and in the vulnerability that people show.

[5 : 29] And we try to bring all that together to say that when God created persons, individual persons, he created us to be a people. To be his people, created people.

In other words, he created us to be his church. To be his bride. And that's a beautiful reminder of how precious you all are. Tonight I want us to focus on this half of our study.

Thinking about humans and humanity as unique and united. And we're going to look at four things. One, the uniqueness of each individual. Two, the unity of each individual.

Three, the uniqueness of the collective human race. And four, the unity of the collective human race. So we'll just go through these one by one together. So starting here with the uniqueness of each individual.

This is a remarkable aspect of human nature. At the moment, Google tells me that there's 8.2 billion people in the world. All of them were standing out there, stretched over the hills of Carloway and beyond.

[6 : 35] It would be too much for you to take in. In terms of the sheer numbers. But if you walked through that crowd, you could pick out your mother. Or your father. Your wife, your husband.

Your child. Your best friend. And you could look at all the 8.2 million others that's not that person. Because that one person is unique.

And that uniqueness of each individual is recognized in Scripture. We sang from Psalm 139. That speaks of being fearfully and wonderfully made.

Our frame not hidden from God. God seeing our unformed substance. The pages of our book written by the Lord before one of them came to be.

And it's all pointing us to the fact that each human being is a magnificently unique demonstration of the work of God's hands. And we're unique in lots of ways.

[7:36] We're unique in appearance. So we all look different. And that uniqueness is seen from a distance. When you stand further away from one another, you can just see that everybody looks different.

Even people who look similar. It doesn't take long to identify differences. But you look more closely and you get down to things like fingerprints and stuff like that. The number of hairs on your head. All that kind of stuff.

The shade of your skin, depending on how much sun you've been exposed to. All of those things just feed into a uniqueness of the appearance of each and every one of us. There's uniqueness in voice.

So your voice doesn't sound like anyone else's. Your voice is unique. And it has its own intonation, accent, strength and fragility.

There's uniqueness in personality. And there are so many. Every single personality in this room is different. We all have different character traits. And many of these are positive things.

[8:41] Some of them are things that we struggle with and need to work on. But we're all unique in that category. Our personalities are different. And we're unique in our gifting. So there's different things that we can all do.

We all have a certain level of gifts. Nobody is infinite with all gifts. We're all finite with limited gifts. And there's a different variety of giftings in each human. And you'll have seen that a thousand times in your life.

Whether that's in work or sport or whatever it might be. Psalm 139.13 speaks of you being knitted together by God. You see that in verse 14.

Or being woven together. So verse 15 it is. Is it verse 15? No, it's verse 13. Sorry, there it is. Verse 13. You knitted me together then woven in the depths of the earth. In that knitting, God never uses the same pattern twice.

And the uniqueness of each individual has beautiful implications in the gospel. The uniqueness of your appearance means that God will never fail to watch over you.

[9:44] He'll never look at someone else thinking it's you. He'll never mistake your identity and think, Oh, whoops, they're over there. I lost track of them.

The uniqueness of your appearance means he'll never fail to watch over you. The uniqueness of your voice means that he'll never fail to hear you pray. Every time you pray, God's saying, That's them.

I hear them. Whether that's praying out loud or praying in our hearts, it's still heard by God. Our unique voice. The uniqueness of your personality means that God will never find somebody who will do instead of you.

And I think that is so incredibly precious. Because it's so easy to think that before God, Oh, there are a million people that he would like better than me.

Not true. Never true. The uniqueness of who you are means that nobody can ever take your place in God's eyes.

[10:50] And the uniqueness of your gifting means that there are things that God wants you to do that only you can do. And that applies in the many different contexts that God places us.

All of it is taking us back to the fact that the uniqueness of each individual is just pointing us again to the astonishing variety in the creative powers of God. You see God's just his magnificent power and artistry in his creative work.

And it's important to remember that your uniqueness arises from specific design, intentions in the mind of God. What I mean by that is just that God thinks about what he wants you to be before he makes you.

And so you are the product of what God has intended, what God has designed. And Psalm 139 is speaking of that. Now, obviously, sin has messed that up in lots and lots of ways.

But leaving that to one side just now, that primary in our nature and identity is the product of the design intentions of God.

[11:58] And that's so, so important because it means that your uniqueness will fulfill its potential more and more when your life aligns with the will of God.

So in other words, what I mean by that is that if you're made according to the will of God, if we live out our lives in a way that's contrary to the will of God, then we're failing to live up to our potential. But if our lives align with the will of God, then our potential is being fulfilled.

Now, when I say the will of God, it's really important to recognize that I'm not meaning will of God in terms of, you know, should I be a teacher or a doctor or should I live in Edinburgh or Glasgow or, you know, big life decisions.

I don't mean that. I mean the will of God in terms of day-to-day obedience to his moral commands. Loving him, loving one another, following what his word teaches.

That's what the will of God is far more concerned with and focused on. So often people think that if we walk away from God, then we'll be able to be truly ourselves.

[13:00] That God's restricting me and he's spoiling my life and he's stifling my potential. If I just walk away from God, I can really be myself.

That is never true. It's theologically impossible. Because when we walk away from God, we step onto the path where we will destroy ourselves.

Sin is always promising to make you more than what you feel you are. So anger and greed promises to make you feel more powerful.

Sexual sin promises to make you feel more attractive and fulfilled. Revenge and unforgiveness promises to make you feel more content. But all of these leave you less than what God has made you to be.

Anger and greed pulls you down from satisfaction and leaves you feeling insecure and jealous. Sexual sin pulls you down from purity and faithfulness and leaves you feeling ugly. Revenge and unforgiveness pulls you down from contentment and harmony and leaves you feeling bitter.

[14:08] If you look at the Old Testament, again and again Israel thought, we will gain more if we just become like all the other nations. In other words, we will gain more if we give up our uniqueness.

And so often we're the same. It's a false promise. All of your unique gifts and qualities will flourish.

And all of your unique needs will be met by walking with Jesus. Beside Jesus is where we are made to be.

And that uniqueness of each individual also emphasizes that each individual makes a unique and crucial contribution to the collective human race.

That's true universally. You see it all across the world. But it's especially true in the church. And it's important to remember that in building the church, Jesus is building a new restored humanity. And in that church, each individual makes a crucial contribution.

[15:13] That's where the image of the body is so good. Jesus is the head. And then there's thousands of different parts. All fitting together. All working together. Each unique individual making a wonderful and beautiful contribution.

Secondly, I want us to think about the unity of each individual. Now, I think I've used this word before. But theologians will describe each human as a psychosomatic unity.

Psychosomatic unity. Now, that big long word there comes from two Greek words. That's the Greek word *psyché*, which is the word for soul.

And *soma*, which is the Greek word for body. And so, it's emphasizing that we are a body-soul unity.

And that unity is a key part of our nature. That corresponds to two Hebrew words. The word for dust. And this word here, living creature, which is a really important Hebrew word.

[16:27] It's the Hebrew word *nefesh*, which is often translated soul in other places. So, it's the same emphasis. You see in the creation of man, the dust is formed.

And then, life is breathed in. And the man became a living creature. A psychosomatic unity, body, and soul together. And this is the teaching that runs right through scripture.

That's why we read from Ecclesiastes. Because it makes the same, it displays the same pattern. In verse 7, it speaks about the dust returning to the earth. Echoing Genesis 2.7.

And the spirit returning to the God who gave it. So, that's linking that. And that's linking that. Same pattern. Body and soul.

Dust and *nefesh*. Combined together. All of that means that a human is a physical and a spiritual entity. So, an essential aspect of who we are are physical bodies.

[17:30] So, bodies, face, voice, blood, organs. All the stuff that's going on in us all the time. But an equally essential aspect of who we are is non-physical.

So, our thoughts, our emotions, our desires, our choices. None of those things are physical. You can't go and pick up a bundle of choices or desires.

They're non-physical, but they're crucial to who we are. And it's important to remember that part of our uniqueness is related to the *soma*, to the body. The way we look, the way we appear.

That's part of our uniqueness. But also part of the uniqueness is the *psyche*, the soul. The personality, the thoughts, the desires, the emotions. All of these tie together.

Two important things that we need to highlight are, one, the body is good. Two, the soul is real. The body is good. The soul is real. And we need to highlight those two things because throughout history, one of those two things has frequently been denied by people.

[18:34] Many have viewed the body as intrinsically bad. So, this was a big emphasis in Greek philosophy. And Greek philosophy is grounded in what we would call a dualism, where there's kind of a big separation between the spiritual and the physical.

And the basic idea was spiritual stuff is good, physical stuff is bad. So, if you look, in lots of ways, maybe in the late 20th century, it was different.

Because if you look at the most powerful people in the world, in Western culture in the late 20th century, who was it? The most beautiful people. The film stars, the pop stars, the people who looked amazing. In the Greek world, who were the most powerful people?

The philosophers. The thinkers. It didn't matter how they looked. What mattered was how they thought. Because that spiritual realm is the one that matters. The body is bad.

And when you have that point of view, you have often out of that develops a religious mindset that thinks that salvation comes from escaping the body. That this body is holding us back and ruining everything.

[19:38] We need to escape it. But the biblical teaching on anthropology is the exact opposite. The Bible teaches that the body is intrinsically good.

So, the body is not to be escaped from. It's not to be attacked. Instead, the body is to be restored. And that's why the resurrection is so important.

That the body is going to be restored. Because the body is good. And of course, Jesus gives a glimpse of that. With all the physical healings that he performed. Sometimes there's a danger that we go in the other direction.

The body is to be valued and cared for and protected. But not idolized. And sometimes there's a danger that we go in the other direction. And the body gets idolized. We've seen that in our own culture in recent years. So, some of you, the body is evil.

And that's unbiblical. Others have said that the soul is not real. And that's the movement that people have drifted towards in the last couple of hundred years.

[20:41] Particularly as what we would call a naturalistic worldview has become dominant. Where we think that everything is just material. That there's no God. There's no supernatural. Spiritual is just a kind of vague thing.

Everything actually has a material explanation. The soul is not really real. And so, there's the... On that viewpoint, everything has to have a physical explanation.

So, your thoughts, your feelings, that's just chemicals. And your consciousness, well, that's just kind of advanced activity in your brain. But it all has a physical explanation.

Nothing can ultimately be spiritual or non-physical. And coupled to that is the idea that, you know, the soul, if it's not real, then it's not immortal.

And this is where you see a fascinating contradiction in the society around us all the time. Where you pull people into a religious education class. And you say, you know, is the soul real?

[21:39] No. Do people live on forever? No. Then you take them out of the religious education class. And you take them to a funeral. And they say, he's watching over me. Because no human heart can live with the logical conclusions of a naturalistic worldview.

And all of that just is reinforcing the fact that biblical truth is written on our heart. Because the biblical position is that we have a never-dying soul.

So, at the heart of biblical anthropology is the soma and the psyche. The psychosomatic unity. And these are to be a harmonious unity.

And this is so important for us to recognize. Your flesh and your heart belong together. Your physicality and your feelings belong together. Your bodily nature and your spiritual nature belong together.

And they're created by God to exist in beautiful harmony. So, we see this in lots of ways. You experience joy in your heart. Your mouth can sing. Your mind can plan and design.

[22:49] Your hands can build. Your spirit is moved with compassion. Your guts are moved with compassion. Your feet can run to help. Your heart can fall in love.

Your arms can embrace. That's how it's made to be. A beautiful, harmonious unity. But so often, these are intention. And that's part of the impact of sin.

Disrupting that unity. Our minds and our bodies are at odds. And you see that very powerfully today. I was speaking a moment ago about Greek dualism. And you're thinking, oh, that's the most irrelevant thing ever.

Because you're thinking, oh, what's that got to do with life? What's that got to do with my Monday morning? Today, the dualism, spirit is good, body is bad. Well, Greek dualism is re-emerging rapidly at the moment.

Because there are people who feel imprisoned by their thoughts, tormented by them. There are people who feel that they've been born in the wrong body.

[23:53] That identity on the inside bears no relation and unity with the physical body that they're in. And there's people who want to escape the world that's around them.

In the midst of all that tension, some people try to alter their minds. How do they do that? They drink alcohol. They take drugs. It's all a mind-altering exercise to make you feel better on the inside.

Other people try to alter their bodies. And as technology advances, you see that happening more and more. And all that's happening because one is seen as the source of the other problems.

The problems of the Soma are caused by the Suge. The problems of the Suge are caused by the Soma. There's no unity. There's no harmony between them.

All of that's the effect of sin. All of it's a betrayal of our true nature. Now, this is really important to recognize from a pastoral point of view.

[25:07] That the unity of body and soul is how we are created to be. And these things can't be separated and can't be kept. They can't be seen as though they have no relation to one another.

Our body and our souls are uniquely and beautifully woven together. And this has big, big implications pastorally. Because sometimes people can feel that they've got a problem with their soul.

When it's actually a problem with their body. So some people will feel really anxious about their faith. Full of doubts.

Questioning everything. Struggling with everything. Unable to pray. And it feels like spiritually there's a mess. And all the time, what's really wrong with them? They're physically exhausted.

And because you're just knackered. Everything else is affected. And you think, oh, my soul's a mess. It's like, no, your body's tired.

[26:13] When your soul's a mess, you think, oh, I need to pray more. I need to read more. I need to do this. I need to do that. All the time, it's like, you need to have a holiday. And have a rest. And likewise, the other way around.

Sometimes, you know, we can have, well, related to that. Sometimes, you know, we may struggle with our mental health. And it is a physical issue.

It's a physical issue in terms of, you know, needing medical treatment. That's to be expected. It's never a betrayal of your faith to need to take appropriate treatment for a condition that you maybe have developed.

But the truth is also the other way around. Sometimes people have a problem with their body that's actually a spiritual problem. So maybe you are longing to feel fit or to feel attractive.

And you're crippled by insecurities about your appearance. Maybe you're really struggling with aging. And you're just terrified at the fact that your strength is slipping away and you're getting old.

[27:20] And you think, all of these physical problems are consuming me. And you think, I want to get fitter. I want to get healthier. I want to fight off the aging process. I want to stay well. I need to keep everything good.

And you're trying to fix that problem with physical stuff. The solution is spiritual. If you don't feel attractive, if you feel like you're getting old, if you're terrified of your body falling apart, the solution is just to fall into the arms of Jesus.

And know that, yes, here we have no continuing city. Here our outward flesh is perishing. But his promise to us is eternal life where we're renewed and healed forever.

So we are a psychosomatic unity. This week, are you going to look after your body? This week, are you going to look after your soul? The two go hand in hand.

I need to go very quickly. Otherwise, this is going to turn into three sermons rather than two. The uniqueness of the collective human race. In the creation narrative, we've seen this already, but it's worth highlighting again.

[28:31] Unique status is given to humanity. The collective human race enjoys a place in creation that is given to no other. Now, a lot of that's connected to bearing the image of God. We're going to look at that in more detail in a couple of weeks' time.

Unique prerogatives are given to humanity. And ever since, humanity has accomplished extraordinary things through the collective exercise of the prerogatives that God has given us.

In other words, nothing else in creation is what we are. Nothing else in creation can do what we do. And we can do it all, and only do it all, collectively, through our connection to one another.

Psalms 8 captures this. There's a contrast drawn between humanity and the rest of creation. It's humanity that's been given dominion over the works of God's hands. All things are under his feet, all sheep, oxen, beasts of the fields, birds of the heavens, fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

As a group, humanity is unique. Unique in abilities and attributes. Unique in knowledge and achievements. Unique in morality and responsibility. Unique in ability. And this is so important for us to recognize in the face of the alternatives to Christianity that we see around us today.

[29:40] Because so many people today want to just make humanity, well, we're just a kind of slightly more advanced animal. And we're not actually fundamentally different to any part of creation.

Now, at some levels, that's true. We are dust. And we said before, I think a couple of weeks ago, that when there's connections and links made between our DNA and the DNA of an ape or a pig or a banana, that's to be expected.

It's all dust. It's all made from the same stuff. So that's true to a certain extent. But it's crucial to recognize that Scripture places humanity in an entirely unique category.

There's a dignity and a value and a preciousness attached to any and every human being that no other part of creation shares.

That's right. What are the worst kinds of crime that anyone can do? Crimes against humanity. Those are the worst crimes of all. Day-to-day life can leave us a bit numb to this truth.

[30:47] Every single week of our lives, you know, we're surrounded by people. And we can underestimate the value of the person sitting next to us on the bus or sitting next to us at school or sitting next to us at work.

And sometimes these people can be tiresome and difficult. Day-to-day life can leave us numb to this truth about the uniqueness of humanity. But an emergency will always clarify our theology.

Even for somebody who's not a Christian. If the wholly committed, naturalistic, evolutionary biologist was walking along the shore and there was three children hanging from the pier with stormy seas underneath them, he is never in a million years going to turn around and say, the fittest will survive.

An emergency clarifies our theology. Written on our hearts is the knowledge that there's something utterly unique about the collective human race.

Finally, number four, the unity of the collective human race. Here's a quote. I should have put it on the screen. I forgot to do it. It's from the theologian Herman Bavinck. He says that the unity of the human race is a certainty in Holy Scripture, but it has almost never been acknowledged by the people who live outside the circles of revelation.

[32 : 08] What he means by circles of revelation? People who live without the Bible influencing their lives. In other words, throughout history, people have denied a unity and an equality between humans. And instead, there's been claims, many, many claims, that there's superior and inferior classes and categories of people.

So sometimes that's based on ethnicity. So the Greeks thought that they were superior to the barbarians. Sometimes that's based on race. You've seen a thousand horrific examples of that in history. Sometimes it's based on a caste system.

And you see that particularly in Eastern religions, people are born into a caste. And there's a difference there that you can't escape. Sometimes it's socioeconomic, where people who are well off are actually, you know, just that wee bit better than others.

You know, whether we would directly say that or just implicitly live that way. And sometimes there can just be a subtle aversion to anybody who's different to us. Humanity is constantly doing this, making categories of superiority and inferiority among humans.

For centuries, those kind of denials of the unity of the human race were widely accepted. So you go back to the Greeks, perfectly normal to think that Greeks are superior to barbarians. Of course they are. And we've seen racism being widely accepted across the centuries.

[33 : 22] But more recently, the idea of that superiority and inferiority among classes or categories of humans has become grossly offensive. And the reason it's become grossly offensive is because of the influence of the Bible on Western culture.

Because it's the biblical worldview that teaches that the unity and equality of the human race is a non-negotiable. It's the Bible that taught that men and women are equal.

It's the Bible that taught humanity that black and white are equal. It's the Bible that taught humanity that Jew and Gentile are equal. It's the Bible that taught humanity that the strong and the weak are equal.

Now in saying all that, I'm aware that there are many, many examples in the church of people who did not realize this. But they were betraying what their book proclaimed. The Bible is emphatic on the equality and unity of humanity.

Scripture relentlessly opposes any dismantling of the unity of the human race. We're all created by God. All made in His image. All equal before Him.

[34 : 34] And that unity and uniqueness of the human race, just as we close, is so important because people crave both of these things.

People crave uniqueness. And people crave unity. But people are looking in the wrong place. And so today people crave uniqueness, but they look for it in individualism.

And it's like, just being myself, doing my own thing, being true to myself. And yet the ironic thing is that when you see people who are doing that, and especially when you see children who are doing that, they're kind of thinking, I'm going to just be myself and I'm going to go in a totally different direction.

Actually, what are they doing? They're just copying something that they've seen on social media or that they've read or something like that. Their individualism is actually just a copying of somebody else.

But they're doing that because they crave uniqueness. And people crave unity. But they look for it in a kind of tribalism.

[35 : 38] And that might be, sometimes that happens in terms of race and stuff like that. But it can also happen in terms of things like sport. It can happen in football. It can happen in terms of national identity.

We want to be united to some people, but we look for a small version. And we think, oh, if I'm just part of that group, then I'm united with them. And that's fulfilling the craving that I have.

These patterns are so powerful in our society. The gospel gives you a far better version of both. Because in the gospel, you as an individual, you're utterly unique.

Chosen, beloved, and precious. In the gospel, you discover that you are made to live as a harmonious unity. A settled heart, a balanced mind, a happy person.

That's what every Christian is going to be forever. Settled heart, healthy body, happy mind. Beautifully balanced.

[36 : 42] In the gospel, we are unique. The new restored humanity that Jesus is creating. Made to be his.

Made to be his church. Made to be his bride. And we are united through Jesus. A new humanity. Beautifully woven together.

Through our faith in Jesus. Jesus. David asked the question, What is man? The devil has offered humanity a thousand lies.

In answer to that question. And all of those lies are trying to undermine the uniqueness and the unity of each individual. And the uniqueness and the unity of the collective human race.

The devil has offered a thousand lies to that question. God has only ever had one answer. What am I?

[37 : 50] What are you? God's answer is, You're my precious people. You're made for me.

I love you. And I want you with me for eternity. That's what he's calling all of us to again tonight.

Amen. God's answer is,