

The Creation Of Humanity (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Well, this evening I'd like us to turn back to Psalm 139 and we'll read again verses 13-14. Often people today will talk about the real you and by that they mean the person that you really are.

And that's tying in with concepts like identity and self and individuality. And for people today, all across our culture, discovering the real you is a good thing. There's a value placed on the idea of being who you really are, being true to yourself, being the real you.

And to do all that is a positive step in the eyes of our culture. And conversely, to not do that is seen negatively. So people should not have to hide their true identity.

And people should not have to put on an external front. And people should not have to conform to what other people expect them to be. These are very dominant forces in our culture today.

Now at one level, there's issues with all of that kind of thinking. That kind of emphasis is definitely feeding into the highly individualistic mindset of today's culture.

[1 : 31] And that can have lots of effects. And sometimes it can leave people maybe living in a world in their own minds and with an understanding of themselves.

That's actually irrational. It does not conform to reality. And sometimes it can lead to confrontation because somebody's own convictions about who they are may be incompatible with somebody else's convictions.

And so we can see these kind of tensions in the world around us. And coupled to that, there's this kind of irony in our culture where at one level there's this great emphasis on individualism and being ourselves or two selves.

And yet at the same time, Western culture is dominated by forces that are trying to make us conform to expectations that are set by others. So fashion, what we wear, there's a pressure to conform.

Advertising, what we buy, pressure to conform. Consumerism, what we eat, what we use, what we enjoy, what we chase after. There's actually forces around us all the time trying to influence us so that we all move in the same direction, that we all follow the same patterns of behavior.

[2 : 39] So there's a bit of irony in this kind of thinking. And you can see that secular politics of today is struggling to maintain the balance between free speech, free expression, and conformity to the rapidly changing norms and expectations of a secular society that we live in just now.

So all this kind of like, be the real you, be true to yourself. There are issues with that. And these have been highlighted many times. At another level, though, I want to say that it's actually a very important thing to do this.

It's actually a very good thing to do this. We absolutely need to think about who we really are. And many people are thinking about this question, but almost everyone is looking for the answer in the wrong place.

And what I hope we're going to discover over six weeks or so is that only the Bible gives us the answer to who we really are.

And in contrast to the individualism that we see around us today, the Bible emphasizes the collective identity that we share.

[3 : 54] In other words, the Bible teaches us about the real us. Now we're going to look at this in six parts, which are kind of going to fall into two halves.

So first of all, we're going to look tonight at the creation of humanity. Then we'll think about the nature of humanity in a couple of weeks' time. Then the purpose of humanity. And then the second half of the series, we're going to look at some aspects of biblical teaching in a bit more detail.

So we'll think about humanity as the image of God. We'll think about humanity as male and female. And then finally, we'll think about humanity as a blessed covenant creature.

Now, I'll explain that term when we come to it in a few weeks' time. So tonight, we are here. Part one, thinking about the real us, we're going to look together at what the Bible teaches us about the creation of humanity.

And we're going to have three headings. These are the divine act of creation, the distinct language of creation, and the deliberate climax of creation.

[4 : 56] And these are all in reference to the creation of us, the creation of humanity. So starting off here, I want to ask you a question. Where do you come from?

How would you answer that? There's loads of ways that we can answer that question. We might talk about the place we're born. We might talk about the place we grew up. We might talk about the place where we currently live or where we've lived for a while.

You might have a narrow answer. You might say, I come from Upper Carloway. You might have a slightly wider answer where you say, well, I'm from the Isle of Lewis. Or maybe a broader answer. I'm from Scotland. How does the Bible answer the question, where do you come from?

Well, I think you know the answer. The great emphasis of Scripture is that every creature, including humanity, finds its existence in and owes its existence to God.

The in the beginning God of Genesis 1 is actually the key to discovering the real us. It's from Him that we've come.

[6 : 08] He's our creator. It's to Him that we owe our existence. Where do you come from?

Ultimately from Him. Now, I want to just unpack that a little bit more, and I want to talk about three things.

First thing I want to talk about is the mind of God. Now, in Genesis 1, when you read the opening verses of the Bible, you're immediately confronted by activity. Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters.

God speaks. Let there be light. There was light. All of it is activity. And in the voice of God, the works of God are being externalized and accomplished.

What He wants to do is becoming a reality. But that external work of God that we see in Genesis 1 is actually rooted in the internal work that takes place in the mind of God.

And theologians will often speak in those categories of the internal work of God. And that then moves on to the external work of God. And so, what that basically means is that what God does outwardly arises from what He has decreed inwardly.

[7 : 21] And so, the work of God in creating humanity, the activity that we see in Genesis 1 and 2, is actually accomplishing what the mind of God has purposed and decreed.

What that means is that God thought of you before He made you. God thought of you before He made you. Psalm 139 captures this.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written, every one of them the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Now, I think that verse can apply collectively to humanity and it applies individually to every one of you. Thinking of you is never an afterthought to God.

God has never needed to be prompted to think about your existence. The truth is actually the other way around. Your existence is prompted by the thinking of God.

[8 : 29] If you are listing the achievements of your life, your life achievements, line number one of your life achievements should be this. You found a place in the mind of God.

And that place of humanity in the mind of God gets hinted at in Genesis 1, in verse 26, where there's this kind of deliberate pause.

God's been creating all sorts of things. And then in verse 26, there's a pause. God says, let us make man in our image after our likeness. And it's only after this pause to speak that humanity is then created.

And we'll look at this version in a little bit more detail later on. And we'll probably come back to it loads of times in our series. At this point, I just want to notice that that kind of pause in the narrative in Genesis 1 is giving us a window into the mind of God.

And as you look into that window, what do you see? You see the real us. You see where you came from. And so our existence is rooted in the mind of God.

[9 : 39] Second thing I want to highlight is the will of God. Because the mind of God is, of course, revealing the will of God. Everything that happens in Genesis 1 and 2 is an unfolding of God's will.

And that's emphasized by the repeated, God saw that it was good. It was the stuff that God wanted to happen that was happening. That, of course, applies to us. Your existence arises from the will of God.

Now, that's obvious from Genesis 1. It's explicitly stated in Revelation 4. 11. Worthy are you, O Lord, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

That applies to all things. That applies especially to you. And the important thing to highlight here is that this is where the Bible stands in stark contrast to the alternatives in the world around us.

For thousands of years and still today, humanity has been seen and explained as an accident, as a mistake, as a product of chance, as a product of violence, sometimes in Greek mythology, as an unintended occurrence, as in the outpouring of competing forces, the outworking of competing forces in nature.

[11:00] There's all these explanations. They're all depressing. The Bible places you in a totally different category.

The Bible grounds your origin and existence in the will of God. And then the third thing we come to is the activity of God, which is what Genesis 1 focuses on.

What God's mind contemplates, what God's will desires, is accomplished through the activity that God undertakes. And the Bible's emphasis, centered to the Bible's description of the creation of humanity, is the action of God.

God doing things. And you see a few examples. 1.27, God created man in his own image. Genesis 2.7, the Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground.

And Genesis 2.22, the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Now, that third one there, Genesis 2.22, the ESV is maybe not the most perfect translation there because it is totally accurate.

[12:12] But in the Hebrew, all three of those verses begin in the same way. And the Lord God created in 27. And the Lord God formed in verse 2.7. And the Lord God made in 2.22.

It's all just a stark emphasis on the fact that God is doing this. God is doing it all. Now, we're going to come back to these terms in more detail.

But just now, the key point is just answering our question. Where do you come from? And the answer is you come from the mind of God, from the will of God, from the activity of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And as Psalm 139.17 tells you, these are precious thoughts. The thoughts of God that decreed your existence and desired your existence and that led on to the activity of your creation, these are precious thoughts.

Hold on to them. I want you to hold on to those thoughts. Remember that you have never, ever slipped God's mind from eternity.

[13:31] Remember that your origin is founded in the desire of God. You're wanted. Not an accident, not a mistake, nothing.

Wanted, intended, deliberately desired by God. And remember that God Almighty, he acted.

He engaged in activity. He, this is not the best way of saying it, but he got out of bed and did something so that you might exist. He took steps.

He engaged in activity so that you could become a reality. Creation of humanity is a divine act. It's a glorious, beautiful, divine act.

The Bible also speaks to us and reveals the distinct language of the creation of humanity. What do I mean by that? Well, what I mean by that is that there's actually lots of different words and expressions used to describe the creation of humanity in the Bible.

[14:39] And I just want to go through some of these because each one, I think, just teaches us a little bit more detail about who we really are.

The first is the word for create. And I'm not going to give you all the Hebrew words that are here, but I am going to give you this one.

This is the Hebrew word bara, which is just a significant word in the Bible. It's not that common a word, but it's significant because it's reserved for the creative activity of God.

And so it's God who does the baraing, if you like, in Scripture. He's the subject of this verb whenever it's used. And it's always speaking about what only God can do.

And it's frequently emphasizing the absolute newness of what's being created. And so this is something that only God can do.

[15 : 44] And you see it in several times. It appears a couple of other times in Genesis 1. It appears in other places throughout the Bible. But what I want you to see is that in Genesis 1.27, where it talks about our creation, it appears three times.

And so there's this. That's the only place where it appears three times in one verse, as far as I know. And the emphasis is on the fact that God is making something special.

It's in the creating of humanity that God's creative activity reaches its high point. So that's a big and important word. There's this created, creative power of God revealed in that Hebrew word, bara. Next one is a straightforward one. It's just the word made. Let us make man in our image. That's a word that comes up tons of times in the Bible. It means to make, it means to do, it means to fashion something.

And in many ways, the focus is on the one who's doing it. And this is highlighting the fact that God is our maker. And so, again, it's speaking about the one to whom we owe our existence to.

[16 : 59] It's speaking to us about God's activity and what God is capable of doing. And in fact, that actually ties in with what we'll look at later on, as how we, as image bearers, we too become makers, capable of making things ourselves.

The emphasis here is that our existence is owed to God. He is our maker. Moving on to the next one. Genesis 2.7.

It says, Now, that's, it's translated form there.

Other times it's translated fashion. Elsewhere, this word is used to describe a potter. And so, that immediately kind of opens up our thinking.

You think of a potter forming a lump of clay. There's this idea of shaping something. There's perhaps an emphasis on artistry.

[18 : 03] That there's a skill and a beauty involved. And I think that part of what this word is pointing us towards is actually the uniqueness of each individual.

That humanity is not just created as this collective lump of humans. Rather, each individual is fashioned, shaped to be a unique display of God's workmanship.

We are formed by him. We're the clay. He's the potter. Next word is used in Genesis 2.22. And it's in relation to the creation of the woman.

Now, it's translated maid there. But it's a different word to the maid that we had in Genesis 1.26. It's a different word. And it's the word that basically means to build.

And so, Genesis here is describing the creation of the woman. And what God's taken from the side of man, he uses to build the woman.

[19 : 08] Now, we'll think more about the emphases of biblical teaching about male and female later in the series. Interesting here, though, is just the contrast that's been used between the language of forming the man.

So, formed the man here in 2.7. And built the woman as we have it here. Man just needs a potter. Making woman needs an architect. Now, maybe that's saying that women are a bit more complicated than men. Maybe it's a hint that they're more stable than men.

It's definitely a statement that there's something uniquely valuable about women. Next word I want to give you is actually the word Adam, which is what's translated man.

And what I want to highlight here is that the word Adam is very similar to this word here, the word for ground, which is the Hebrew word Adama. And that's just a very deliberate connection that's being made.

[20 : 21] That as the Lord makes us, he is forming man from the dust of the ground. And so, the biblical description for the creation of man is not that humanity is kind of beamed onto the earth, zapped into existence out of nowhere.

Actually, the potter takes the dust of the ground and forms us from that. And in doing so, what's the Bible trying to tell us here?

It's trying to tell us that there's a strong and deliberate connection between humanity and the created environment that we're placed in. God uses the dust of the ground to form us.

And then it's that ground that nourishes and sustains us. It's that ground that we are to go and cultivate in order to find food and be sustained. Now, there's lots that we could say here.

But the important thing to note is that the Bible does not place humanity in a unique biological or chemical category. The Bible does place you in a unique spiritual category.

[21 : 24] But it does not place you in a unique biological or chemical category. In other words, the Bible is very clear that the world around us is made of the same stuff as us.

The stuff out there is atoms, molecules, elements, compounds. So are we. And that's where, you know, when there's discoveries that show great similarities between our DNA and the animal kingdom or even our DNA and plant life, when that's discovered, the theologian says, of course there is.

That's exactly what we are expecting from the Bible. That there's this connection between us and the world that we're created to be part of.

Two more words. I'm conscious that I'm just zipping through these very quickly. Genesis 32, not Genesis, Deuteronomy 32.6. This is interesting. This is in the context of warning the people of Israel.

But you have this just interesting language dropped in here. Do you thus prepare the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father who created you, who made you and established you?

[22 : 40] Now, some interesting words here that I want to bring out before you. And in order to see these, I'm going to pull up two other verses as well. Well, so, Psalm 119.73, we sang that verse.

You've made and fashioned me. Your hands made and fashioned me. Now, that fashioned there is the same word as established. So, those two are the same word.

My arrow didn't give myself an arrow there. Those two are the same word. And then you formed my inward parts. That's the same word as created here.

So, it's a different word for created. And it's interesting here. What I want to highlight here is that this word here, that one, the fashioned one and established one, that's the word that speaks of establishing something to make its existence certain.

So, it's like making something very deliberately. It's something that's certain, established, made to last. So, that's the emphasis that's been caught in this word.

[23 : 46] The other word, let me change my color. This word, the formed and created, that's actually the language of ownership. And so, the God who creates us, establishes us to stand firm, is the God who owns us.

He's made us to be his. And together, these words are reminded that God has made you to be his own forever. The New Testament carries on with these emphases.

Ephesians 2 speaks about us as his workmanship. Now, that chapter, of course, is speaking about our salvation, how we are saved, recreated in Christ Jesus. But it is still echoing the truths that are emphasized in regard to our original purpose.

And what that's reminding of us for this sermon tonight is that every time you look at the person beside you, every time you look in the mirror, what are you seeing? You're seeing the workmanship of God. And then, Acts 17 speaks about God making the world, everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since it's he himself who gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

And I just want to highlight that word, gives. It's emphasizing that life and breath and existence and everything that we are, everything that we have, comes because of what God gives.

[25 : 13] Two more, I think. Do I have two more? Yes, two more, and then we're done for this section. There's a connection to fatherhood in relation to the creation of humanity.

Acts 17, again, speaks of us as his offspring. Luke, in his genealogy in chapter 3, goes all the way back to Adam and describes Adam as the son of God. Now, that's not conveying the idea that God somehow gave birth to Adam.

It's speaking of dependence, that we are totally dependent on God. And it speaks of privilege, that there's a relationship between us and God. And that relationship is highlighted by the final thing I want to highlight, that Genesis makes an important connection between humanity and this title here, the Lord God.

So if you read Genesis 1, you'll see that it speaks about God, and that's the Hebrew word Elohim. That word comes up again and again and again in Genesis 1.

God made the beasts, God saw that it was good, God made this, God saw this, God made that, God saw that. All Elohim, Elohim, Elohim. When you come into Genesis 2 and into Genesis 3,

there's a shift.

[26 : 28] And the title changes from just God, Elohim, to this, the Lord God. And that's a hugely significant term. It's the capital letters, as you may remember, is the Hebrew term Yahweh.

That's God's personal covenant name. And then it's Elohim again, the Lord God, Yahweh Elohim. And so you see that just something's being added.

And so the mighty, powerful God, Elohim, makes the world. The covenant-keeping God, who loves His people forever, makes you. And so there's just a deepening of the connection between us and God in the creation of humanity.

Now, I've whizzed through that very quickly. And don't worry if you forget all those things that I just told you. Why am I telling you all of that? I'm trying to get you to see that there's this beautiful breadth of emphases in terms of you being made.

And so in the Bible, you know, we might say, well, I was made by God. Like, that's great. But it's bigger than that. And it's better than that. And it's richer than that. Because in making you, God creates you, forms you, builds you, establishes you, owns you, crafts you, gives you life, and does it all in the context of His unrelenting covenant commitment to His people.

[28 : 07] In other words, your existence is just a beautiful tapestry of all of these remarkable acts of God. Or, as Psalm 139 tells us, you're fearfully and wonderfully made.

There is something fear-inducing, heart-trembling, and awe-inspiring about your existence.

Now, I'm sure, if you're anything like me, you have never stopped to think that. But it's true. The fact that you exist, that your body and soul is united together, that you're sitting here today, you're walking through your life, you can breathe and hear and look and talk, taste and smell.

There's something awe-inspiring about that. In other words, your existence should make you stop and think, who are we?

What are we? Where have we actually come from? Where are we going? And what am I doing with the existence that I've been given? So there's something fearful, fearful about how we've been made, but there's something wonderful and breathtaking about your existence.

[29 : 42] It's just amazing. If you just stop and think about it, if you stop and think about it at a biological level, unbelievable how our bodies function.

If you stop and think about it in terms of an experiential level, the stuff we're able to do and enjoy, amazing. And if you think about it in terms of an experiential level, and if you think about it at a spiritual level, the God who is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, unspeakably and undescribably majestic, powerful and glorious, wants to make you.

He wants you to exist. And that means that your existence should make you stop and say, wow. So we've got the divine act of creation, distinct language of creation. Very quickly, the deliberate climax of creation.

This is the final point that I want us to notice. Genesis 1 and 2 and the whole Bible makes it absolutely clear that humanity is the climax of God's creation. You see it in Genesis 1.

[30 : 51] There's far more words used in Genesis 1 for describing creating humanity than are used for any other creature. I just want to do a wee comparison. Look at Genesis 1.16. Look at the description of the creation of the trillions of stars that exist.

Three words. And the star. And look at the description of the creation of you. So much more detail. The pace slows right down when Genesis 1 reaches humanity. We spoke about that divine consultation in Genesis 1.26. Let us make. I want to give you a couple of quotes from John Murray. He was a Scottish theologian, but he spent most of his life in America. He wrote about all of this. The uniqueness and the climax of humanity. He says, man is not in any aspect of his origin on a parity with other creatures.

The distinctiveness appears in the counsel of which his origin is the effect. Now that sounds complicated. What does it mean? It's basically saying you're in a category of your own. And that category of your own originates in the thought of God.

[31 : 59] The counsel of which your origin is the effect. Your existence, your origin is the effect. The result of what God thought of. You've been in a category of your own from the very first thought that God had of you.

Man's origin is not only the unique subject of God's counsel. Man from the outset is the recipient of unique endowment and dignity. In other words, God thinks of you in a way that he thinks of nothing else.

And God has endowed us with capabilities that only we have. And there's lots of other ways in which scripture emphasizes this.

I'm running out of time, so I'm going to move on. I want to say three points. One, humanity enjoys higher privilege because of this. So there's a status, a glory, an honor that humanity enjoys that no other part of creation shares.

What we could even say is that there's a holiness in humanity. In that we are set apart from everything else at the climax of creation.

[33 : 05] So there's a higher privilege. Secondly, there's a greater responsibility. And we'll see more of this as we work out God's purpose. But humanity is given a greater set of expectations, greater responsibility.

And there's huge implications of this for our morality, our understanding of ethics and morality. Because everything that's bad in the world around us and in our experience as humans, everything that's bad, the reason it's bad is because we were made for better.

We were made for better. We were given greater responsibility. So humanity enjoys higher privilege. Humanity enjoys greater responsibility. And humanity prompts intensified delight in the triune God.

In the creation of humanity, when God says, let us make humanity in our image after our likeness, you'll see there's a change that takes place.

With all the other things that are created, it's God saw that it was good. God saw that it was good. God saw that it was good. When humanity is created, God saw that it was very good. So when God said, let us make man in our image and after our likeness, he's saying, let us make this creation go from good to very good.

[34 : 15] God said, let us make this creation.

God said, let us make this creation. Let us make this creation. The us that thinks that we can do without God is not the real us. It's actually a deceived us.

We're totally dependent on our creator. He gives us great honor, but without arrogance. But the Bible's account of creation also gives us humility without despair.

Because we cannot escape our smallness. But when we feel low and useless and worthless, we are also failing to recognize the real us.

Because God has made something incredibly special when he made you. And in Psalm 139, David captures all of this by saying something remarkable and something hugely important.

[35 : 38] He says in verse 14, my soul knows it very well. All too often, we don't know this truth very well at all. We don't know this when we look at ourselves.

Sometimes we badly overestimate ourselves. We think we know it all. We think we can do it all. We think we can decide it all. We think we don't need God. We can't. We never could.

We were never made to. We should never expect it. And when we think that we can do without God, that is not the real us. It never will be. But maybe more often than not, rather than overestimating ourselves, maybe for most of us here, the bigger problem is in the other direction. We ruthlessly condemn ourselves. And we see ourselves in hugely negative terms. We see things that frustrate us, disappoint us, and that we feel God must be disgusted with.

And sometimes people think that they're a waste of space. Do you know that the truth is, you're actually the reason there is space.

[36 : 53] You're not a waste of space in this creation. This creation was made to give you space. To give you a space to live.

And to enjoy. To enjoy your creator. And to enjoy one another.

As part of the beautiful human race that God has made. And so we don't know this truth well when we look at ourselves. We also don't know it well when we look at other people.

And all the patterns of behavior that you experience week on week. Where people are judging one another, criticizing one another, exploiting each other, resenting one another. And all that other stuff that goes on. All of that is forgetting the value of the people that God has made around us.

And when we look at others. We want to see them the way God sees them. We want the Bible's teaching to be the lens that we're looking through. David says in verse 14 and wonderfully made.

[37 : 54] I'm sure my soul knows it very well. When he speaks of being fearfully and wonderfully made. I'm sure there was times when David forgot it. There's definitely times when we forget it.

But what David knew when he wrote this psalm. Jesus knows at every moment. Because what does Jesus see when he looks at you?
He always sees the real you. He sees the real us. And he can see that we were made precious and beautiful and remarkable by God.
And he can see that sin has marred that. And caused so much damage. And do you know?
That's exactly why Jesus looked at you and me. And all of us. And he said. I'm saving that.
[39 : 05] I am going to save these people. Because he can see the real you. He can see what you're really for.
I hope that what Jesus knew. I hope we know it too. Amen.