

Creation Offices

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, for a wee while tonight, I'd like us to turn back. We'll read again 1 Corinthians 1, 15, 21 to 23, but we'll be dipping into Genesis and other parts of the Bible as well.

But let me read these verses on the screen. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.

But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. As I mentioned this morning, we've been working through a series in our evenings called The Real Us. And we dipped into it this morning because I've been taking too long with my series and we are running out of time before Christmas. So we've made it a morning and an evening service for today. The big point in this series is that we are wanting to think about who we really are. And that's something that you see in society all around us. People will often talk about that, how it's so important to be true to yourself, to your identity, to be who you really are.

[1 : 1 1] And that's seen very positively in our society today. It can cause difficulties and problems and we can see that. We've seen that in this series and we see it in life around us.

But the basic premise is a good one. We should think about who we really are. And the claim that we're trying to make in our series is that the only place where we're going to find the answer to that is in the Bible.

And the great thing about the Bible is that the identity that it gives us is not an individualistic identity that just looks within and focuses entirely on ourselves.

The identity that the Bible gives us is one that we share. It's a collective identity the Bible teaches us about the real us. And we've been looking at various topics, the creation of humanity, the nature of humanity.

Over the past two weeks and the evenings, we've been thinking more about the purpose of humanity. Both the nature and purpose of humanity, as we saw this morning, ties in with bearing the image of God, which is what we looked at earlier today.

[2 : 1 7] But there's still a little bit more that I want us to look at under the purpose of humanity. And we're going to pick that up tonight. And we're just finishing off what we've been studying over the past couple of Sundays, where we've been seeing that in Genesis 1 and 2, there are some categories of teaching given that all relate to our purpose.

We've been looking at the creation mandates, creation ordinances, and creation offices. Now, that maybe all sounds a bit complicated. Maybe it sounds a bit weird. Let me just unpack what we mean by these as we recap.

Creation mandates is referring to the fact that from the beginning of the Bible, there's some specific activities and objectives that humanity is to accomplish. And Genesis 1.28 speaks about that.

It speaks about being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth and subduing it, having dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. And we divided that into three parts, a dominion mandate, a cultural mandate, and a relational mandate.

And what we mean by that is that humanity is made to have a ruling role over creation, that we are to exercise a rule, a care, a leadership.

[3 : 3 7] And all of that is not so that we can exploit the world, but so that we care for the world and that we carry that responsibility that God has given us. Cultural mandate is the idea of filling the earth and using the resources and opportunities that the world has.

So God's created this world with amazing potential. We are to discover that and to cultivate it as humanity grows and extends across the face of the world.

And then we also said that there was a relational mandate. We are to enjoy our relationship with God, with one another, with the created world around us and with ourselves. Sin has made all of these things ugly.

So now power is abused and culture is full of all sorts of darkness and relations are so often strained and broken.

But the gospel makes all of these beautiful once again. So creation mandates are at the heart of our purpose. Then last week we looked at creation ordinances.

[4 : 40] These are patterns and structures established by God at the creation that are to shape human life and which are to have ongoing relevance for us as we fulfill our purpose.

And there's four creation mandates, creation ordinances highlighted or identified from Genesis 1 and 2. That's procreation, marriage, work and Sabbath rest.

And you see these in Genesis 1, 28. In Genesis 2, 1 to 3, Genesis 2, 15, Genesis 2, 24. It's all there. We are to multiply, to raise new generations.

We are, men and women are to be married. We are to work and we are to rest. And as we said last time, these in many ways serve in pairs. So procreation and marriage is under the kind of pair of family.

Sorry, I made a mistake there. I need to rub that out. I put two A's by mistake. And work and Sabbath is in the idea of work and rest.

[5 : 45] And we said last week that both of these combine in terms of a balance of potential and protection. So procreation is fulfilling the amazing potential of the human race as we grow, as new generations are raised up and as we go from the first humans to billions of humans.

And so that potential is being developed. Marriage places a protection around that. So a new generation is not raised and unattended. A new generation is raised and nurtured and protected within that family unit established by marriage.

And work is the same. So much potential is realized through work. And the principle of Sabbath rest provides protection alongside that potential. And all of these are there for two key reasons.

God wants humanity to survive. And God wants humanity to thrive. So the creation ordinances are also an important part of, a very important part of our purpose.

Tonight we're going to wrap all this up and we're going to think a little bit about what we're going to call the creation offices. Now what on earth do we mean by that?

[6 : 59] Well what we're meaning by that is that there are specific roles given to humanity. And these aren't immediately obvious to us in Genesis 1 and 2.

But if we look more closely we can see that they're there and as we go through the rest of Scripture we discover that these are incredibly important. And the three offices, the three official roles are prophet, priest and king.

And there's a quote there from a theologian called Cornelius van Til. And he's describing humanity as we're created and he identifies these three roles.

That as a prophet, man was to interpret the world after God. As a priest, he was to dedicate his world to God.

And as a king, he was to rule over it for God. So these roles, these offices are given to us. Prophet, priest and king.

[8 : 04] Now let's just go through them one by one and we're going to go through them in the reverse order that we have there and we're going to start by thinking about humanity as king. Now that's maybe the most obvious one because it ties in very closely with what we call the dominion mandate.

And you can see the instructions given that humanity is to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and have dominion over the fish of the sea, birds of the heavens on every living thing that moves.

And you see the same emphasis again in Psalm 8. You've given him dominion over the works of your hands. And we noticed this last time that the three great spheres of life that are mentioned in Genesis 1, the sea, the skies and the land, all three are the areas that humanity has given dominion over.

And so humanity is to serve as a king in the creation. Now of course, that rule as king is under the sovereign rule of God.

So it's not to replace God, but it's to serve under God. And so humanity rules as a vice regent. Humanity rules over the earth, under God.

[9 : 16] Over the earth, under God. And an important consequence of that is that humanity is made to lead. Humanity is to carry responsibility. And humanity is to maintain a God-established order.

Now, again, it's so important for us to remember that often we can think of leadership, monarchy, government, power. We can think of all of these things in negative terms because we see them used in a negative way.

But we're stepping back before all that to think about what this is all meant to be, what the best versions of these things were meant to be. And humanity is given that role to lead and to care for the creation.

And so basically, God is like, look, here is an amazing world. Here is an absolutely amazing world. And I want it to be yours.

And I want you to look after it. And I want you to make the most of it. And I'm placing you as king over it. And so humanity is created with that beautiful, privileged role of leadership that brings a special honor and dignity for humanity.

[10 : 32] And again, this is where, you know, what the Bible teaches us on page one about humanity is so different to what common worldviews in our society will say.

Because, you know, the Bible is saying, look, you're all made to be kings. And when I say kings, I'm not just talking to men. I mean all of you. Men and women together, made to rule, made to be kings, rulers together as humans.

We're given that unique and privileged place in creation, standing over it all in the service of God.

The Bible is saying that to us, whereas the rest of the world around us is saying, you're just an accident. And actually, you don't have any eternal significance at all.

The Bible's view of your worth, of your role, of your value, is so much higher. So king, that's maybe the easy and obvious one. What about the other two?

[11 : 38] Well, let's look at this one. Priests. In what way are humans priests? Well, this is not as immediately obvious. But the key thing we need to recognize here is that when we talk about the Garden of Eden, it's not simply a beautiful garden.

The Garden of Eden was also the first temple. So where the first humans were placed, the beautiful environment that they were in, functions as the first temple.

Now, again, it doesn't say that in Genesis 1 and 2, but we can see it if we look closely. Because if you compare Genesis 1 and 2 with later passages in Scripture, you can see lots of connections get made between Eden and later on the temple that gets built further on in the Old Testament.

So I'm going to give you just a couple of examples so we can see if we can see some of the connections. So here's a description of the temple that was built much later within 1 Kings 6.

Solomon's building it. This is around the year 950-ish, something like that. A little bit later than that, about 930, something like that. And it says, So imagine you're standing in there, and you're looking around the temple, you're seeing palm trees carved into the woodwork.

[13 : 19] You're seeing open flowers. All of it is deliberately looking like a garden. So when you're standing in the temple, it's echoing Eden.

Genesis 2 describes the garden, and it speaks about precious stones and minerals there. And you see the same connections get made in the temple.

There's an example from Exodus 28, which describes some of the clothing that the priests were to wear. So in Eden, you've got rivers flowing out of it.

There's gold, there's bdellium, there's onyx stone. And then when you see the clothing that the priest is going to wear, as described in Exodus 28, it describes that you shall set into it four rows of stones, sardis, topaz, carbuncle, emerald, sapphire, diamond, jacinth, agate, amethyst, beryl, onyx, jasper, set in gold, filigree.

So you've got the stones, you've got the gold, same stuff coming up again and again. You've got the river flowing out of Eden there in verse 10 and 12.

[14 : 27] Later descriptions of the heavenly temple speak in the same way. Ezekiel 47, which prophesies the future temple, which is basically talking about heaven, talks about water flowing out, a river flowing out.

Revelation 22, same thing. Show me the river of the water of life flowing out from the tree of life. Same language again and again and again.

Another hint is that in Genesis 22, it says that the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to work it and to keep it. Then later in Numbers, it talks about the priests serving, and it says they

shall keep guard and they shall minister in the tabernacle.

Now this is where English language is not as helpful. This was all written in Hebrew originally, and that word there and that word there are the same word, and that word there and that word there are the same word.

And so in other words, the language is being repeated. So what man was placed in the garden to do, to work it and keep it, the same language gets used to describe the roles of the priests in the tabernacle.

[15 : 38] And then I've got one more. In Genesis 3, it talks about the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And then when God speaks about coming to dwell among the people in the tabernacle, he speaks about walking among them.

And when he describes his presence in the tabernacle as they came out of Egypt, he talks about moving about, but that's actually the same word again.

So same words being repeated, lots and lots of connections being made. To quote one commentator, he says, the Lord walked in Eden as he subsequently walked in the tabernacle and the temple.

So lots of connections, lots of evidence that help us to see that Eden was the first temple, Adam was the first priest.

And so when we think about Adam in the Garden of Eden, we shouldn't primarily think of him as a gardener, although there was a sense in which he was that. His role as a priest is actually in the foreground.

[16 : 44] Now some important points relate to that in regard to our purpose. First of all, it's teaching us that we're made to worship. So the language of the category of priest is the context of worship.

We are made to worship. And that is so, so easy to prove. It is hard to find worshippers of Jesus in Scotland today. It's not hard to find worshippers.

Because everybody is worshipping stuff. Whether it's their football team, or their career, or their house, or their car, or their bank balance, or the boy or the girl that they're in love with, or their social media profile, or whatever it might be, everybody is worshipping.

And that's arising, that's a distorted version of what we see in our original purpose, that we're made to worship God. The role of the priest is also emphasising that we were made for a constant and close relationship with God, our Creator.

So God, when God made us king, He didn't say, okay, I'm making you king, just get on with it, I'll leave you to it. No, He gave us responsibility as king, but then as priest, there's to be this constant connection back to God.

[18 : 01] Constant daily walk with Him. Constantly glorifying and enjoying Him in priestly service. And thirdly, another interesting point is that the priestly office ties with the cultural mandate.

Now, this is where our way of thinking is probably very different to the way the Bible thinks. So when we talk about the cultural mandate, what we're talking about is how we believe that cultural mandate.

We believe that when you read Genesis 1 and 2, and you read about God's original commands to creation, God is saying, go and make the most of all the potential that's in the world.

So go and work, discover, innovate, research, create artwork and music, and climb the highest mountains and explore the depths of the sea, and enjoy the beauty of creation, and see what amazing things that you can do, cultivate this amazing world.

And so when we think about the cultural mandate, we're talking about all the discoveries of engineering and science and art and literature and all of that. That's what we're cultivating, that's what makes up a culture, and that's part of what God commands us.

[19 : 18] Now, when we think about the word priest today, or when we think about anything to do with kind of religious devotion, our minds probably think dull life, or something along those lines.

Somebody who's sort of like buried in books like the ones I showed you, locked away from the rest of the world, and not connected to real life at all. And so when we think of the word priest, we kind of think, oh man, that's going to ruin my life, because it's almost like we've become kind of religious weirdos, and cut off from everything.

And it seems a long, long, long way from this cultural mandate that we've been speaking about in Genesis 1 and 2. But here's something fascinating.

When you look in the Old Testament, where is it? There's one place in the Old Testament where you find the greatest engineering, the greatest craftsmanship, the greatest architecture, the greatest poetry, the greatest artwork, and the greatest music.

Where do you find it all? You find it in the temple. And the temple in the Old Testament is like a microcosm of all the earth's potential, all the great potentialities of the earth.

[20 : 45] And so as we bring that into today, we're asking the question, should Christians avoid all these things, art and architecture and music and literature, and all these things, should we avoid all of these things, keep away from them because of that?

No, we should be involved in all of these things. We should be avoiding all the stuff in them that's awful, but we should not be avoiding these things themselves. We should be involving ourselves in them and pursuing them to the glory and enjoyment of God.

It's all part of our devotion to Him. It's all part of our priestly service. And then last of all, let me rub all of that out now because it's in the way.

Last of all, we see the office of prophet. Now that's maybe the least obvious of them all from Genesis 1 and 2, but it's actually, the evidence for it's actually very, very simple and straightforward. It comes from Genesis 1, 28, and it comes in that phrase there, God said to them. And the key point here is that humanity hears and receives the word of God.

[21 : 55] That's the point. Humanity hears and receives the word of God. So earlier in Genesis 1, there are lots of and God said. So and God said, let there be light.

And and God said, let the earth be filled with this and that and the next thing. And God said, and God said. Now we have and God said to them. We've got direct speech to humanity, all speaking of that relationship that we have with him.

And there's a couple of there's a couple of extra hints that we have in this verse as well. If this is speaking, as we said before, about the the ordinance for procreation, to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth.

And again, it's when we think about it, we see that it's quite straightforward that as the ordinance of procreation is fulfilled, as new generations are born, they need to be raised up. They need to be nurtured.

And they're not going to be born with a full knowledge of God. Instead, they need to be taught. And so the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was going to have to be repeated.

[23 : 05] To the next generation, the next generation would need the prophet's message. And all of this is because the filling of the earth is not just about numerical growth.

It's not just about occupying space. There's more. The earth is to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The temple is to reach the ends of the earth.

Eden's not meant to just be this tiny corner. It's meant to expand and grow and fill the earth. So that there will be a multiplication of worshippers of the Lord.

Later in the Old Testament, you see this kind of emphasis in Habakkuk chapter 2. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

That's the kind of objective that God wants. And that knowledge of God comes through the prophetic word, through the word of God's spokesperson.

[24 : 02] And the final hint comes in this little phrase, God blessed them. When we talk about blessing, we're talking, it's a crucial phrase. It's showing us that all of this, when we talk about blessing, we're talking about God's relationship with his people, his desire to be good to us, to bless us because of our covenant relationship with him.

And central to that relationship that we have with him is the role of the prophet, the fact that God speaks to us, that we receive his word, and his word is communicated.

So, in Genesis 1 and 2, we have these three offices, prophet, priest, and king. And king, in many ways, ties in with the dominion mandate, as we've said.

And priest ties in with the cultural mandate, so too does king as well. And all three of them tie in with the relational mandate, the fact that we're made to enjoy a relationship with God and one another.

Now, why am I telling you all of this? And why is this important? Well, it's important for three or four reasons that I'm just going to go through very quickly. First of all, in Genesis 3, when Satan comes to tempt humanity, each of these three offices gets attacked.

[25 : 32] So the serpent says to Eve, did God really say? That's an attack on the prophetic office. It's questioning God's word, saying, look, you've got the prophetic word wrong.

Did God really say that? He didn't really say that. And so that office is being attacked by Satan. The serpent also says, you will not surely die.

That's an attack on the priestly office. He's saying, you can approach God any way you like. You don't need to conform to his commandments. In fact, he's restricting you.

And actually, you'll get even closer to him. You'll be like him if you take from the fruit that he's commanded you not to eat. You don't need to listen to what God is telling you in terms of approaching him.

The priestly office is getting attacked. And then the serpent says, you will be like God if you take of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's an attack on the kingly office.

[26 : 31] Because humanity is made to be God's vice regent. And Satan knows that. But he says, you can be even more than that. You don't need to be a vice anymore. You will be like God.

And so all these offices are getting attacked and undermined as the serpent tries to tempt Adam and Eve. The prophet should have been knowledgeable enough to spot the lie.

The priest should have been dedicated enough to refuse to profane God's temple. And the king should have been bold enough to expel the serpent. But in all three of these, the first prophet, priest, and king failed.

Secondly, and crucially, each of these are prefiguring what Jesus has come to do. So when we speak of prophet, priest, and king, in all of these ways, our minds should straightaway go to Christ. Because all of these things that we see in Adam and Eve and the first humans, we see them again and we see them perfectly in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 46] And these are what we call the messianic offices. When we say Jesus is the Christ that he's the Messiah, he's the Messiah because he's the prophet, the priest, and the king, the anointed one who fulfills all these roles.

That's why we read from 1 Corinthians to say that in all the ways that Adam messed up, Jesus comes and fulfills what was required.

And so as by a man came death, by a man Jesus has come also the resurrection of the dead. But as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ.

And this is teaching us a couple of amazing things. It's teaching us that Jesus has come to succeed where Adam failed. And that's one of the crucial ways in which the whole Bible holds together the stuff that Adam was meant to be at the beginning, that he fails to be in Genesis chapter 3.

Jesus comes as the second Adam in order to fulfill these roles, perfectly, so that all the damage that was caused at the beginning can be restored. And so the whole thing fits together so beautifully.

[28 : 56] But it also teaches us that from the very beginning, God's purposes of salvation are woven into everything. So you're reading through Genesis 1 and 2, and as you start to read it more closely and more closely and more closely, you see prophet, priest, and king woven into it.

And then as you read on in the Bible, you see these things coming up again, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, and you see them ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, who's come to be the Savior. And what does that tell you? It tells you that from page 1 of the Bible, God's great purpose is to save you.

God's great plan is that you will be his. His purposes of salvation are woven into everything. The third reason why this is so important is when we talk about prophet, priest, and king, this maybe sounds like totally irrelevant theological jargon.

But the truth is, everybody, ever since Adam and Eve, everyone is choosing false prophets to listen to, false priests to dedicate their lives to, and false kings to obey.

There are prophets in your life this week that are going to tell you to do stuff. that are going to be on your phone, in your feed. I'm not saying that, I'm not saying they're weird religious figures, I'm not saying that, I'm just saying they're people who are saying, you need to do this, you should do that, you should do the next thing.

[30 : 34] That's what you should do. That's the authoritative voice in your life. It might even be your friends. You think, I just need to do whatever they say, whatever my friends say, whatever will make them happy, that's what I need to do.

There will be priests in your life that say that if you pour yourself into this, you'll be happy. Pour yourself into your school grades and get five A's, then everything will be fine. Pour yourself into your job, earn more money, then everything will be fine. Pour yourself into career and get a good pension, then you'll be fine. Then you'll find happiness. All these promises of the priesthood are saying, dedicate yourself to this, dedicate yourself to that, that will make you happy. False promises. And there are kings everywhere wanting you to listen to them. influences around you, always wanting you to do what they say. The world is so full of false prophets, false priests, false kings.

All of us need to make sure that the prophet we listen to, the priest we rely on, the king we serve, is Jesus Christ. And the last thing is that this is reminding us is that when we talk about our purpose and when we think about how we want to live out our lives this week, it's reminding us that at the heart of Christian discipleship is one very simple thing.

[31 : 54] Christlikeness. Adam was made to be the prophet, priest, and king. He failed. Christ has come as the perfect prophet, priest, and king. He's died and risen again and succeeded.

He's calling us to follow him and as we become more like him, we become more and more restored to what we were originally made to be.

And it's a great reminder that the more we are like Jesus, the more we will fulfill our purpose. Amen. Let's pray.