

SALVATION AND HOPE: JESUS, THE TRUE IMAGE BEARER

Genesis 3 • Char Brodersen

Introduction: Good morning, church! If it's your first time joining us, we are in our final teaching in our current series called The Story of Humanity. We've spent the last seven weeks looking at this biblical teaching of humans as image bearers of God, seeking to understand more fully what that means for our own identity, belonging, value, and purpose as followers of Jesus.

Last week, we looked at what we call the Fall and its dire consequences for humanity.

Adam and Eve have rejected God's kingly reign. They have rejected the rest and reign of God pictured in the Seventh Day.

Where YHWH's kingdom was one of order, of life, joy, beauty, and peace, humanity's kingdom is one of loss, anxiety, and violence.

All the cosmos is subjected to humanity's choice. Now we are living in Adam's world.

Now God's good creation and plan for humanity is unraveling before our eyes.

Sin and Brokenness touch everything:

Discord and disharmony

Humanity's identity is lost and confused

Humanity's access to God's presence is barred by destroying angels

Humanity's home is lost

Humanity's dominion and stewardship over creation is now a great struggle, producing thorns and pain.

Where Mankind (Adam) was meant to rule over the ground (*Adamah*), now they will be slaves to it and finally imprisoned to it: "From the dust we came to the dust we shall return" waiting for our redemption—the resurrection of our bodies.

Adam and Eve had the authority to make this choice, but they did not have the agency to hold the cosmos in check after making it. Now without the Seventh Day—God as King over all—the structure cannot be maintained.

Something I want to make clear is that though humanity has fallen from its place as the pinnacle of creation, the image and likeness of God is not removed. The phrase "image of God" appears again in Genesis 5 and Genesis 9 after the fall and after the judgment of the Flood.

Humans still bear the image though we do not bear the image well ...

As we read God's ideal for humanity laid out in Genesis 1–2, we can see that we are clearly not what we were created to be—not what we were meant to be. Our fractured relationship with God our Creator has affected everything else—our relationship with others, within our own selves, and even the rest of the creation. Our vocation as image bearers is diminished in its effectiveness, the glory we reflect out into the world is now a faint flicker of what it was meant to be.

It is now, from here on out, that redemptive history begins. The rest of the Scriptures are ultimately

concerned with this question and dilemma—how will humanity get back to the garden, back to their position of ruling and stewarding over all of creation? How will we become what we were created to be?

Strangely enough, God has already hinted at this redemptive hope. Some have coined this promise of Genesis 3:15 as the Proto-evangelion—meaning the First Good News. It is truly mind-blowing to consider that even before God deals out the consequences of Adam and Eve’s rebellion and rejection of his kingly reign, removing them from their priestly work over God’s garden temple, God already has spoken of their redemption. Grace precedes judgment. God introduces his redemptive promise, our only hope—The Head Crusher!

As God judges this crafty, deceptive Serpent, he declares,

*“I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”*

—Genesis 3:15

The offspring of the woman will wage war against the Serpent and will crush his head, and yet would be mortally wounded in his victory.

As Christians, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is this Redeemer—the One who crushed the head of the Serpent there on the cross and has now brought humanity, who recognize and receive him as their King and Redeemer, back under the reign and purposes of God. But Jesus doesn’t just restore humanity’s ideal, he totally accomplishes and completes it.

I mentioned before in our series on the Story of God how in the end of the Gospels, Jesus is making an incredibly powerful statement about who he is and what he has accomplished. He has us brought back to the vision and ideal of Genesis 1–2.

Matthew 28:18–20 says,

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

Jesus declares: **“All authority and power is given to me.”** Jesus is the unrivaled King (the One who has conquered the world, sin, Satan, and even death).

- Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
- And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age—God in our midst.

This is the Genesis 1 and 2 reboot!

- Through Jesus Christ and his redemptive work, humans have been brought back into the plan and purpose of God
- God as King through our Lord Jesus Christ, God in the midst of his people and humans working as covenant partners with God to spread the news of his kingdom-reign to the ends of the earth.

Christians often make this mistake when talking about Jesus, only to focus solely on the cross and not his life. It gives the impression that Jesus only came to die on the cross, and the rest of his life is almost a necessary evil, or almost just him waiting for the right time. We need to remember that the Gospels leave out the majority of Jesus' life, where he lived out his human existence like most of the rest of us do—learning, working, playing, relating, worshiping. Though the cross is absolutely necessary for the redemption of humanity, so also is Jesus' life as a human being, for our understanding of what it means to truly be human and bear the image of God.

I. Jesus the true Image Bearer

- A. In the Old Testament Scriptures, the phrase, “image of God,” only appears in Genesis 1, 5, and 9. And although there are other passages showing us what it means to be human, the phrase “image of God” is absent from the rest of the Old Testament. However, when we come to the New Testament, we encounter passages that speak of the image of God. Strikingly, these predominantly refer to Jesus or now to God's people being formed into Jesus' image.
- B. **“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Colossians 1:15**
- C. **“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:1–3**
- D. **“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:4**
- E. For many of us, it goes without saying that Jesus is the image of God. After all, he is God! But if we view his status as God's image primarily as a feature of his deity, we will be missing the point. Jesus is not the image of God because he is God; he is the image of God because he is human. His entry into human history is God's reboot and redemption of humanity. Jesus is the ideal human who is and does what humans were meant to be and do. We said in our teaching on humanity as image bearers that one way to see our image-bearing is in our vocation.
 1. **Image of God as Substantial**
 2. **Image of God as Functional**
 3. **Image of God as Relational**

II. Jesus, the True Human

- A. As I mentioned, we often think of Jesus as the image of God or even the term Son of God as a term of divinity. But the only other reference to the Son of God in Scripture is in reference to Adam in Luke 3:38. The idea behind both of these titles being given to and referring to Jesus is actually showing us that Jesus is a New Adam, the new and ideal human, something that Paul the apostle will later expound on in his letters to the churches. Remember how Paul says that for anyone who is in Christ, they are a NEW creation?
- B. Jesus as the one who truly bears the image and as the second or New Adam then becomes the standard and ideal for us of what it means to bear God's image in the way that humans were created.
 1. **Image as Substantial.** Refers to our rational thought, the ability to discern and pursue “the good and right,” and a special capability to love and to be able to relate to God.

- a. Think about the story of Jesus temptation in the wilderness. Jesus has just been anointed with the Spirit of God and is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. He goes forty days without food and now he is hungry. Along comes Satan to tempt or test him. This story is intentional in contrast to the first temptation. Jesus is the New Adam, tempted not in the paradise of God with the luscious provision around him, but tempted in the wilderness with no provision. But depending on the power of the Spirit alone and the goodness of his Father, he cuts through the deceptive lies of Satan and is victorious where Adam and Eve failed.
 - b. But also there is Jesus' last temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane where he is so overwhelmed with the weight of the cross before him, knowing that his obedience to his father will cost him suffering and his own life, he submits himself, praying: Father, not my will but yours.
2. **Image of God as Functional.** Refers to the unique role that humans play in caring for creation, directed to rule and steward over the creation under God's reign. We know that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, taught the way of the kingdom of God, and displayed the power and presence of the kingdom of God. But have we ever thought of this proclamation, invitation, and demonstration as Jesus delegated authority as the second Adam; as the true human who was meant to rule over all of creation? What kind of power and authority would Adam and Eve had if they had continued under YHWH's apprenticeship?
- a. Psalm 8 tells us: **"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Psalm 8:3–9**
 - b. Calming the sea, walking on the waters, feeding thousands, restoring sight, hearing, paralysis, and raising the dead back to life! Commanding hundreds of fish right into the fishing nets. Jesus is what Adam and Eve, what we were meant to be, administering over the creation and bringing it back to its goodness and intended wholeness.
 - c. Often we talk about miracles as being supernatural, but that is because we are living in a world under the curse of sin. Miracles, like sight to the blind, the dead being raised, are, if you think about it, the most natural thing in the world. They are not the suspension of the natural order but a restoration of the natural order because God did not make a world with sin, cancer, blindness, lameness, suffering, and death.

"When Jesus expels demons and heals the sick, he is driving out of creation the powers of destruction, and is healing and restoring created beings who are hurt and sick. The lordship of God, to which the healings witness, restores creation to health. Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly 'natural' thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded."

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*

Jesus is the true Human who rules over all the works of God's Creation.

- 3. **Image of God as Relational.** Refers to the fact that humans have been created to mimic the self-giving love of our trinitarian God.

- a. Of course we understand that Jesus did this supremely. Almost every personal conversation drips with love, with kindness, and compassion. I love John's account of Jesus' faithful love to his people. He writes, **"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."** John 13:1
- b. But not only that, Jesus loved God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He loved and obeyed his father with his whole being.
- c. Not only that, but Jesus even loved his enemies. We know that by his words from the cross: **"Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."**
- d. Jesus lives out the image of God in relationships perfectly.

Conclusion: Human beings suffer from a kind of Cosmic Amnesia. We have lost our identity, belonging, and purpose through the Fall, but each of us experience these clues in our human experience, hinting at who we are and what we were made for (worship, meaning, purpose, belonging, human connection, accomplishment, and greatness). It is as we stare into the face of Jesus Christ that we see all that humanity was made to be:

- Loving God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves
- Filled with kindness and goodness
- Doing righteousness and justice
- Sacrificing and serving
- Stewarding and ruling well over God's creation.

Jesus has lived the whole human experience and has now taken humanity to the heights of all of creation, pictured in the creation ideal: it is now a human being, our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who sits on the throne of the cosmos!

As the writer of Hebrews says,

"It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.' Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again 'Behold, I and the children God has given me.'"

Hebrews 2:6–13

Jesus is the human being who has fulfilled God's ideal and plans for humanity, but he has done so not for himself, but for our sake. We are his brothers and sisters. He has irrevocably tied himself to the human race so that where he is, we will be also. What he is, we shall become. Where he sits and reigns over the cosmos, so also we will reign with him! It is only through Jesus, through his salvation and redemption, that

humanity can become what it was meant to be, that you and I can become the true human beings we were created to be.

1. Church, this is why we are all about Jesus. Not only is he our loving Creator, the One who holds all things together, sustaining all things by the word of his power. But he is our Savior and Redeemer who brings us back into God's original identity, plan, and purpose for humanity. And on top of that, he is our example. He's the road map, the archetype, the way, the truth, the life! This is why we must follow Jesus, patterning our way of life after his.

"Woven into the fabric of Christian theology is the insistence that Jesus Christ is the truest, most perfect, most glorious (And Happiest) human being who has ever lived—and that those who want to experience true, full, rich humanness must become like him, must pattern their lives after Jesus' humanity."

Wesley Hill

- a. And so, we are committed to do what Paul the apostle spoke of in his second letter to the Corinthians—to look into the face of Jesus again and again and again, daily, weekly, monthly, for all of our days, and as we do that, the glory of Jesus—his own radiance and beauty—would be reflected in our faces that we might bear his image.
- b. **What would we have done if it wasn't for Jesus?! There is salvation in no other name; he is our only hope to be what we were created to be.**
- c. **Because of this:**
 - **We commit ourselves to be with Jesus**, to meditate on him, his ways, his words, his works; to stare into the face of the true human.
 - **We commit ourselves to become like Jesus**, to practice his way of life and being until they become our way of life and being.
 - **We commit ourselves to do what Jesus did**, love and obey our good Father in the heavens, seek his kingdom first by doing righteousness and justice. Love our neighbor and enemy as ourselves. Say no to temptation and sin, proclaim the Good News in word and deed, bring help and healing to others, speak truth to power and religious hypocrisy, seek out and love those who are far from God.

Communion: Because of human sinfulness and brokenness, there is not one of us who has lived up to the ideal of what God created us for: to love him supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves. So as we come to the table this morning, we come as a people in need of forgiveness and in need of redemption and salvation. And that is what Jesus offer us at this table: forgiveness, redemption, and salvation—his life for our life; his righteousness for our sin and brokenness.

Prayer

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;*

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will,

and walk in your ways,

to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Appendix: Some of us may be wondering: What about Eve? Why in redemption is there only a male figure and not a female?

Since Jesus was male, does this make man the human ideal and woman less than ideal in some way?

Carmen Joy Imes, the associate professor of Old Testament at Biola University, writes,

“Jesus’ entrance into human history through the body of a woman establishes his humanity ... it also says something about the female sex. If women were defective or sub-standard, God would not have chosen to enter the world through a woman. God dignified women’s bodies by being born of a woman. Her womb was his home. Her placenta nourished him. Her strong muscles pushed him through her birth canal (the birth canal he made!) into open air. He was covered in her blood long before he covered her with his own. Her hands held him. Her breasts nursed him. As a recent hymn expresses, ‘Maker of Mary, now Mary’s son.’ God could have chosen another way. But he chose a woman. What’s more, God did not coerce Mary into this role. She willingly accepted her calling to bear the Messiah. She was his first and most devoted follower, surrendering to the will of God and treasuring the opportunity to participate with her whole self.”

She concludes:

“Jesus, born of a woman, is male. The incarnation reverses Eden, where a woman came forth from a man. Both participated equally in sin, and both were found guilty. Now, the ultimate man is born of woman, and both of them model obedient surrender to God. As Irenaeus said, ‘And thus also it was that the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.’”

This is not to say that Mary saves us, but she is a shining model for faith-filled response to the work of God.

I don’t know about you, but these kind of details boggle my mind. God doesn’t waste anything; he is covering all of his bases and redeeming the whole story, but in a deeply subversive and creative way.