

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:8-17
God's Plan for Mankind

I am so glad that you are here today. We have been studying Matthew as a church and have just really gotten started into the ministry of Jesus. Today, providentially, we enter the first Sunday of Advent which means that over the next few weeks through Christmas we get to go back and consider the birth of the Eternal Son. I say providentially because such a moment in our study in Matthew ensures that our reflection will be on the sent Son. I have discovered something while in seminary, something that I knew all along but something that has been forever solidified in my soul. That is, the absolute importance of the doctrine of Christ - Christology, and specifically the fact of his incarnation, his taking on flesh for our sake and our salvation. I hope that you never get over the Incarnation, I hope that you never get over Christmas - the story of the Son coming to save.

Let me tell you how we are going to progress through this season of Advent. We are going to take Matthew's first chapter, the genealogy of Jesus, the sent Son, and go back to the Old Testament to see how God was preparing this world for the coming King. Would you take your Bible please and join me in Genesis 1. I hope to demonstrate today from the very beginning that God has a plan for mankind - God has a plan and purpose for your life. Here's a secret, His plan is the best thing ever!

READ TEXT

1. Man Was Created to Enjoy Fellowship with God

We didn't read the whole chapter of Genesis 1 but the Bible begins with an overarching statement that begins everything that has a beginning: You are a created being. I know how that strikes some of you and I also suspect why some have such a problem with such a question. If you are created it means that there is meaning and purpose. Things don't just happen for no reason but the contrary is true, there is a reason that all things happen. A creator means that there is one who supersedes you, one to whom you are accountable. A creator means there is no true thing as complete autonomy - you are accountable to whoever it is that created. You were created for a purpose.

Knowing there is a Creator does not relieve any pressure from us. Many of you may believe in a higher power but that's about it. The problem: that god is a god in your own image instead of you made in his image. If he molds us according to himself, don't we need to know him so that we can know ourselves? Some have very strange ideas about God. Some see him as a moral monster, causing all kinds of evil. Others see him as a vengeful God. Some see him as a rule counter, while others see him as a granddaddy. But the Bible tells the true story of who he is. When Moses asked to see the glory of God, God showed him his glory by telling him who he is. As he passed by the LORD

said, *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:6-7 ESV) He is a God of love, a God of mercy, a righteous God who is altogether lovely. And here is the best part of the story - we were created to keep eternal festival at the feet of God. We were created by him to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The greatest of all delights is to know God. The most amazing adventure is knowing God. This is the greatest ambition of your heart, the reason that you were made - that you may know him.

Let's look at this truth together in the text. Let's begin just by simply seeing the space given to man in the verses. More space is given to man than to any other created thing. Plus notice the language that is associated with the creation between the animals and man. The animals are created after their kind but whose kind is man created after? This tells us that God is determined to be committed to man. The rest of the Bible is to show just how committed to us he is. There is this wonderful truth in 2 Timothy, one that is almost too wonderful to believe. Listen to it: *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful- for he cannot deny himself.* (2 Timothy 2:11-13) The Bible ends with this glorious vision of us enjoying him forever, being wrapped and engulfed by his love for all eternity as we reign with him for forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth.

Go into chapter 2 and see how it is that God created man. Look at the intimate involvement of God with man. God formed him from the dust of the ground and with language close to the intimacy of a kiss we see God breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life and it's at that moment, after man receives breath, then he comes to life.

Mankind has purpose and the ultimate purpose of mankind is that they may have fellowship with God and enjoy him forever.

(As an aside, I must say, is this the way that you see things? Is God your greatest delight? Have you become so familiar with your version of God that he has lost all his wonder? This time of the year is so perfect for us because it is Christmas and if there is one thing that we know about Christmas is that Nat King Cole is going to be roasting those chestnuts on the open fire while Jack Frost nibbles at his nose. I guarantee you that you are probably going to get tired of hearing about what so many of us know as Christmas. But there are two and now three people that for the next few years at my house are going to teach me what it means to wonder. I get to see my children have Christmas and for them it is anything but run of the mill and mundane. You know Jesus said unless we become like little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Maybe one of the things that Jesus was teaching us is to never lose our wonder, to

never become so consumed with other things that we lose our sense of awe when we think of God.) You were created for more than mundane - you were created to have eternal fellowship with God.

2. Man Was Created To Carry Out God's Will on the Earth

I hope that you understand who the worshiper is and who the one receiving worship is. God is the one that we worship, he is the one that we adore and love. We are dependent upon him for all things. He depends on us for nothing. We worship him, he receives worship from us. He does not need us, but he has chosen us to know him and make him known.

Being made in the image of God means having the capacity for relating with God in a special way. What does this entail? Chapter 2 gives us clues. Genesis 1:26 is translated in its fullest sense by saying, "Let us make man in our image so that they may have dominion..." Now look at chapter 2 and verses 15-17. The details for our relating with God is based upon our joyfully fulfilling his purpose to fill the earth with the knowledge of him. Some react strong against such notions. They think that this "doing God's will" is somehow a burden instead of a relief. You might say, what if I want to do what I want to do? Well, what if what you wanted to do was what he wanted you to do? You see what we just did, we moved from duty to delight.

Isn't this interesting? God can do anything that he wants, but he still chooses to use you and me to fulfill his purposes. After the resurrection of Jesus the disciples were ready for him to restore the kingdom to Israel. All the attention is on Jesus and what does Jesus do? He turns the attention back on them and tells them they will be his witnesses. They will fulfill his creation mandate to multiply and fill the earth with worshippers. To subdue the earth and have dominion over it, to fight back the thorns and thistles and instead see thorns and thistles be replaced with the sweet flower of grace taking root and filling the earth.

We were created to be rulers, created to have dominion, created to be kings of the earth. But not just any king, servant kings, our wills in line with the will of another who is far superior to ourselves. But as some of you know, man chose to rebel. He tried to reverse the role and instead of building the kingdom of God he tried to build his own kingdom and as a result man that was created for fellowship with God was now removed from the presence of God and removed from life. He lived, but his living was slowly dying. He who was created to carry out God's will on earth began to have a hard time even finding out God's will much less carrying it out on the earth.

But God is committed to man and just as in the beginning when he came looking for man, he came seeking and saving the lost ones by sending the Son who came for our sake and our salvation. Jesus was born so that he could save all those who had been born. He lived so that he could save all those who had ever lived. He died so that he

could save any who had ever experienced death. And he rose again so that he could go where no other man had ever gone before - back to life from the dead never to die again.

What was his message while he lived? The kingdom of heaven is at hand. He came to restore the reign of men, to fulfill the plan and purpose of God. How did he do it? In a Garden. He prayed in a Garden before the Cross and after he rose from the dead he was mistaken by Mary as none other than a gardener.

Why? Because you were created to enjoy fellowship with God - Jesus is the way to enjoy fellowship with God. You were created to carry out God's will on the earth. The work of God is to believe on the one that was sent - to believe in Jesus.

God's plan for you: Life in the Son - to know what it means to truly live. Now quite going around in circles, quite trying to find meaning when there is none. Come to Jesus and live. Jesus says, Come unto me all who are weary and heaven laden and I will give you rest. Come find peace, come find purpose, come to Jesus and live.