

“Crowned With Glory And Majesty”

Selected Scriptures

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

January 18, 2009

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Theme: **Praise God For Crowning You With Glory And Majesty.**

Introduction

Imagine this situation. You are on a business trip to San Francisco. You are late for a critical meeting and are driving over the speed limit in your rental car down one of those steep hills when you realize you have no brakes—they don’t work at all!

Panicked, you are on heightened alert, avoid hitting a car at an intersection, spot a narrow alley and head into it hoping to avoid an accident. Immediately you see there’s a tight spot ahead with a dumpster on one side of the alley and an SUV on the other. You think you can squeeze between them, take a deep breath, and then it happens—a shabbily dressed man staggers out from the far side of the dumpster and falls right in your escape path.

You have to make an instant decision. There are only three choices: smash into the dumpster on the one side, the SUV on the other, or run over the man. Some of us might choose to crash into the dumpster while others would pick the SUV. But none of us would choose to run over the man. *Why not?*

We who follow Jesus Christ believe there is an inherent value in every person that not only exceeds any material thing, but is of a higher order and quality. God tells us in Psalm 8 that we are “*Crowned With Glory And Majesty.*” We are thinking about that special, unique nature and value on this Sunday that is set aside to focus on the sanctity of human life.

- The life of every person at every stage of life.
- Life from embryo to grave.
- Every race, culture, socio-economic standing.
- Every state of physical, emotional and mental health.

The big picture, the central truth for us today is to *Praise God For Crowning Us With Glory And Majesty.* We begin by reviewing the...

Basics Of Our Unique Nature.

The Bible tells us we are created “in the image of God.” Genesis chapters 1 and 2 make it clear that Adam and Eve were created by the direct, personal work of God.

- Adam, 2:7, “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”
- Eve, 2:21-22, “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he

slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.”

Central to what we are looking at today are God’s words through Moses in chapter 1, verses 27-28,

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

King David wrote of our uniqueness in Psalm 8:5, “You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!”

But what does it mean to be created “in the image of God?” Let’s start with some of what it does *not* mean. It does not mean that we are gods. Nor that our physical being is in shape or form like God. “God is Spirit,” as we read in John 4:24. Nor yet is being made in the image of God defined by our role and responsibility of ruling over the earth.

Part of the difficulty in defining what it means is that the Bible does not define it. There is no verse that says, “Being made in the image of God is...” The words *image* and *likeness* used in Genesis 1 are basically synonyms with shades of differences. Both indicate something that is similar to an original it represents, but not identical to it. The word *image* can also carry the meaning of representing something else. And so it has been suggested—rightly, I believe—that the people in Moses’ day would have understood this statement as, “Let us [plural of majesty] make man to be *like* us and to *represent* us.”

[Grudem, *Systematic Theology*: 443]

People are unlike anything else God created. The creation account states that animals were made after “their kind,” but Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God. So, part of what being created in God’s image means is we have a unique nature which separates us from the rest of God’s creation. Many theologians have tried to boil down “in the image of God” to one particular quality and many others have tried to create lists and organize the qualities. In the end, it is a broad statement which is defined by the Bible’s description of God. While the image of God in us was marred by sin, it was not destroyed. In Christ it is being renewed, and it will be fully renewed when Christ returns, when we see Him face to face.

It might be helpful to look at a few summary points in this broad description of our unique nature. First, we are everlasting beings. Once life begins, it has no end. Yes, our physical life on earth is limited, but we are everlasting beings. In John chapter 11 Jesus said,

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me *will live even if he dies*, and everyone who lives and believes in Me *will never die*...”

Then, Jesus' description of the judgment of the nations in Matthew 25 states two divisions that include everyone—those who “will go away into *eternal punishment*,” and those who will go “into eternal life” (46). Every person is an everlasting being.

Then, part of our unique nature is being spiritual beings. We were designed to worship God who is Spirit (*cf.* John 4:24). And so through Christ we are able to relate to God, to thank Him, to pray to Him, to bring our questions and needs to Him, to praise Him.

We are rational beings. That is, we have the ability to observe and analyze, and then to order and take action. Along with this comes responsibility, as we see in God's charge to rule over the earth in Genesis 1:28.

And we are moral beings. We have a God-created sense of right and wrong, of the *shalls* and the *shall nots*, of the *mays* and the *may nots*. This is clearly reflected in God's command to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17,

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”

There was right and wrong. There was a responsible, moral choice to be made and there were consequences for the choice.

There is much, much more that can be said here. The Scriptures tell us Adam and Eve were created directly by God with a unique nature. And while it is part of that unique nature, I want to break out some of the unique *value* we have because God created us in His image.

Two Parts Of Our Unique Value.

Because people are unique in bearing the image and likeness of God, they have a unique, intrinsic God-given value. Consider just two parts of this unique value.

First, our value seen in God's strict prohibition of murder. The first murder in the human family was Adam and Eve's son Cain killing his brother Abel, recorded in Genesis 4. God told Cain “The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground” (v. 10), that is, there was a call for retribution, for judgment. God judged Cain for this sin, although He protected him from being killed by others because of it.

After the flood, God gave Noah and his family directions, including, in Genesis 9:5-6,

“Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, *for in the image of God He made man.*”

The reason for God's great value on human life and His prohibition of murder was because He made us in His image.

And so, when we come to the ten commandments, the sixth is "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). The one who willfully takes another's life, God says, forfeits his own. Exodus 21:12, "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death." There was no place of refuge for murder as there was for unintentionally taking a life. In emphatic, even dramatic terms God said, "If... a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even from My altar*, that he may die" (Exodus 21:14). Jesus and the New Testament writers affirm the command not to commit murder.

There is no moral issue in one animal killing another, nor in people killing animals. But the value of every person's life is not just greater than all the animals, but qualitatively different, higher to God. Consider that value in light of these statements:

- In Jeremiah 1:5(a) God told the prophet, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you ..."
- King David wrote in Psalm 139:16 "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them."
- And, being in His image and likeness, Psalm 116 tells us, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones" (verse 15).

Now consider that value in light of the acceptance of abortion and the growing acceptance of euthanasia in Canada and much of the world today. Poll results vary according to the exact questions asked, but consider these:

- A 2008 AngusReid poll on abortion showed that 49% of Canadians think abortion should be legal under any circumstance, while 42% think it should be legal only under certain circumstances.
- On euthanasia:
 - A Gallup poll showed 76% of Canadians support euthanasia.
 - An Environics poll asked Canadians if they would choose palliative care or euthanasia at the end of their lives. 44% chose each of the two; 12% were undecided.

Secondly, our unique value as people is seen in God's gracious provision of life. We could talk about the gift of being conceived, born and living in this world, but I am thinking about God's gracious gift of everlasting life from and with Himself. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, we entered this life spiritually dead, separated from life with God.

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (verses 1-3).

He goes on,

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 4-9)

These are wonderful, great, grace-filled words! These are words that display our unique value to God. Our redemption and spiritual life came at a great price: God the Son humbled Himself to become one of us. He took our sin on Himself and died to pay for our sin. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). How much more than the greatest love we can have is His love for us? The love and value Jesus has for us?

Here is matchless, measureless love and value. How should we live then? Let’s consider some ...

Starting Points Of Living True To Our Nature And Value.

The first is to call people to repentance and faith in Christ. At the onset, we need to clarify that we are called to love each other and people of this world in word *and* in deed. There is no purpose in going down the rabbit trail of choosing either/ or rather than both/and.

When two disciples were walking to Emmaus after Jesus’ death and resurrection and Jesus joined them without them recognizing Him, they told Him, “things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet *mighty in deed and word* in the sight of God and all the people” (Luke 24:19).

Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by *word and deed...*” (Romans 15:18).

As John wrote, in 1 John 3, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.,” (v. 18), the context makes it clear he was saying, “Love not only with what you say, but also with what you do.”

Having said this, the church's, every believer's main mission to the world is calling people to repentance and faith in Christ. Every person bears the image and likeness of God, marred as it is by sin. Jesus has commanded, "... you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We have the same mission as Paul, who wrote, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men..." (2 Corinthians 5:11a). God has made all of us, God has made each of us His ambassadors with the ministry of reconciliation (18-20).

Understanding something of the nature and value of people to God, you and I, if we really believe it, should be, *will be* calling people to repentance and faith in Christ.

Secondly we live true to our unique nature and value by living rightly, or righteously. This begins with our own *right living* before God. God's instruction to His people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is, "Be holy, for I am holy" (e.g., Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16, etc.). We bear God's image and likeness. We are then, as His redeemed people, to be holy because He is holy, as Peter tells us, "in all [our] behavior" (1 Peter 1:15).

Let's look at Scripture for some specifics. First, some broad stroke statements. Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" To which Amos adds, "... let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Then, in a bit more detail.

- Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."
- Proverbs 31 tells us to speak up, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy" (Verses 8-9).
- Psalm 82 adds, "Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked" (Verses 3-4).

You see, it is both word and deed. And James reminds us that faith without works is useless, that faith without works is dead —it is not even the real thing (James 2:22, 26). Being created in the image of God and now recreated in Jesus Christ, we are to live righteously in our personal attitudes, speech and conduct.

We are also to live righteously with respect to everyone else in that they also bear the image and likeness of God, they also have the unique nature and value to God. We are not to silently sit by when people are being abused and oppressed. We are not to silently sit by when lives of unborn children and the sick and elderly are taken.

The final starting point of living true to our nature and value I want to mention today is to thank and praise God. Psalm 8 is one of King David's psalms of joyful praise. He opens and closes with the same fortissimo phrase, "O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth..."

- Praise God because He displays His splendor in the stars and planets above and in little babies here below!
- Praise God because He uses the small and weak to bring down His enemies!
- Above these things, He expresses his praise and calls us to praise God because He has made us "a little lower than God"—He has made *us* in His own image and likeness! He has crowned *us* with glory and majesty!

When we think about God's vast creation, we too ask "Who are we, who am I that You, God, should be aware of, think about and care for me?" Living true to our nature and value means thanking and *praising God for His great goodness and grace in crowning us with glory and majesty.*

Conclusion.

How do we respond to this truth right now?

- Join King David's praise in Psalm 8, and also in Psalm 139:13-14, "You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well."
- Confess our sins of ignorance, indifference and action, knowing that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)
- Determine here and now to stand firmly for what the Bible teaches with grace and love in every circumstance and with everyone.
- Determine to be alert and aware of people in need, and then be a voice for them, give your smile, encouragement, your time and resources to make a difference.
- Take up your portfolio as Christ's ambassador of reconciliation.

Let's go to God now, reflecting, confessing, praising Him and making the decisions which His Spirit brings to our hearts and minds.

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