

# **Early World**

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

## **Sermon 1: Home**

### **Genesis 1-2**

**Dr. Matt Cassidy --- January 19, 2020**

Well, good morning, Grace. I've been chomping over weeks, maybe actually a couple of weeks, these announcements, these family announcements. A lot of things have happened here at Grace and because of our launch and getting started with the New Year, we haven't been able to tell you about these wonderful things. God's blessing us.

One is, we ask you many times about giving at the end of the year. The month of December kind of makes it or breaks it for all non-profits, but here at Grace for sure. And our total intake was over one million dollars for Grace for December. That's part of the good news. The other part of the good news is that there was no gift over \$60,000. And to hit a million dollars with no one getting you halfway there to start --- that means a lot of people gave. And so, I just want to thank you. And we can pursue aggressively and confidently the vision of Grace Covenant Church in the next year. It lets us all sit a little easier. Thank you again for your generosity. Let's all clap for the guy next to us.

My next announcement -- I wanted to make sure this was going to happen before I said anything and not jinx it -- but it looks like we're going to build a parking lot across the street. In a couple of months we'll be finished with that and that will give us opportunities on Mondays through Fridays that we haven't had before because our parking will be available.

Next -- this is huge -- we have decided what to do in the absence of a worship pastor. Wait for it ... I would like to announce to you our new Director of Worship and Production, Jonathan Britnell. Jonathan works in the booth. This is his family. Here's what we've done. We've been on a journey for seventeen months. Mike Gould left seventeen months ago and we hired an organization where we assigned a gentleman named Robbie Seay. Some of you might know him. He's had a couple of albums himself in worship. And he's been looking for a worship pastor for us for probably fifteen of those seventeen months. We've had people come in, we've interviewed some people over the phone, and what we've realized is that we're not like a lot of places. And

two of the things we value here significantly is what we would call chemistry and culture. Character and capabilities are one thing over here -- we had some of those guys and gals. But chemistry and culture was the hard part. And after thinking about it and looking at it, one of the things -- before Mike Gould left, he said, "You should consider a different model. And Jonathan would be just right for that model" -- someone who is overseeing the worship and he's directing that and he's also in charge of production. A lot of churches are going this way, so we have decided to do that officially.

If the guys were up here right now, Michael would still be our primary worship leader. Behind him is a gentleman named Matt. He graduated from Berklee School of Music. He's the band director. And one of the problems we had in finding someone is that the band is such a beautiful team and they work so well together. And it was going to be hard to find someone, and we realized that it was time to make a decision, and so we did. So there.

Another great announcement. This year, just to remind you, and to make a little bit of a transition, this is the Year of the Bible here at Grace Covenant Church. And if you would like to join us, we're reading through the Bible. There are some reading plans that are available online and also some little handouts in the lobby. Also, we got another bucket load of children's Bibles if you're interested in buying those. And there are some adult Bibles -- the best investment you'll ever make in your Christian life or even now -- there are two study Bibles that we'd like you to entertain for purchasing somewhere else.

And then we're starting a course in two weeks called "Live Better." This is an outstanding course taught by one of our most popular teachers -- I think Carol Cummings is teaching this. It's going to be during second hour and she's going through not Genesis, but the rest of the Pentateuch as we are in the Bible reading. And as we're learning from the pulpit, she's going to be applying how the Bible and the laws and insights of grace that we can get from those four books and how you can live your life more effectively. Find out more by going online and registering as well. So, that's awesome. That's going to go right along with our Year of the Bible.

Last week I want to thank everyone for coming. We had a higher attendance last week than we had on any regular Sunday in the history of the church. Yeah, wow, huh? Here's how high it was --- it was higher than our Christmas Eve services last year. Yeah. And then 1,100 people came and stayed to do the Walk Thru the Old Testament together. I think that's the

largest crowd that Walk Thru has had in a number of years. Do you know what? We had such trouble ordering books and stuff --- we did get a new shipment of booklet in. If you paid for the Walk Thru but didn't get a book --- if you paid and didn't get a notebook, they're available at the Connections desk, so you can go by and get one of those.

We're going to have another Walk Thru if you missed that one. If you just want to renew it and remember it, we'll do one that goes from 9:15 to 12:00 at the end of March. We're going to have it in the old auditorium. We'll tell you more about that a little later on.

So, great stuff. And you might have gotten an e-mail – we're going to ask everyone – this is a pop quiz – let's see if you can do it. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to do the Walk Thru real quick. It takes ninety-two seconds. If you didn't go to the seminar, just be Pentecostal for about ninety seconds, okay? That's all it's going to take. And we're going to get this on video this time, so come up and we'll get a picture of this. Turn on the houselights, Jonathan, Director of Worship and Production. Everybody stand up – let's go! Houselights ... from the beginning! Ready, here we go.

Creation, fall, flood, nations, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses. Passover, law, tabernacle, offerings, feasts. Counting, spying, wandering, dying, second law. Joshua, divide, conquer, twelve tribes, judges. Deborah, Gideon, Samson. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes except Ruth and Samuel. United Kingdom, Saul – no heart, David – whole heart, Solomon – half heart. Divided Kingdom, mostly bad kings. Prophets speak. Israel scattered, Judah exiled, Judah returned. Zerubbabel – temple, Esther – queen, Ezra – people, Nehemiah – walls. Wait ... Christ.

Give yourselves a hand! Great job, everybody! Awesome! Have a seat. We'll do aerobics every Sunday before teaching time. That's better than a cup of coffee.

## **The Creation Account**

This week we should start at the beginning, with creation – the creation story. We'll look at Genesis chapter 1 and 2 today and we're going to discover what was meant to be. There has never been a poem with greater consequence than this one. Let me read it.

**“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God**

saw that the light was good. Then He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.’ God called that “sky.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.’ God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “sea.” And God saw that it was good.

“Then God said, ‘Let the land sprout vegetation – every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit’ ... And God saw that it was good. And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

“Then God said, ‘Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years.’ God made two great lights – one larger to govern the day, and the smaller to govern the night ... And God saw that it was good. And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with bird of every kind.’ And God saw that it was good. And He blessed them and He said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth.’ And the evening passed and the morning came, marking the fifth day.

“Then God said, ‘Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind. Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.’ And God saw that that was good.”

And now the climax of the poem.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.’ And so God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. Then God looked over all He had made, and He saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.”

And all God’s people said ... Amen. What a beautiful poem.

## Belief in the Existence of God, Belief in Miracles

In the Bible, the creation story, everything begins with God. When He creates it is called *ex nihilo* – out of nothing He creates things. All things are contingent, but not God. He is the unmoved mover. He is the uncaused cause. And when I was looking at today's passage, I thought, *Boy, I could spend a lot of time on various proofs for the existence of God*, and I will not do that. There are a lot -- the issues of God and science and faith and science. And what I would like to do is recommend a book that I'm just reading now, and it's called *Jesus Skeptic*. He's a skeptic about Jesus. This is a young journalist, an award-winning journalist, and he looked at proofs for the existence of Jesus and God. And, by the way, he wrestles with issues with the history of faith and science. He delves into the history of faith, the Christian faith, and justice. You're going to love this book. It's an easy read, but when you read it you'll find yourself saying, *Wow, there's a lot out there that we don't know about that's not popular, that's not well known, about the proofs for the existence of Jesus, and especially the proofs of social justice issues for the last 2,000 to 4,000 years, even.*

In the context of the topic of God himself – we'll talk about man the rest of our time – but when we look at the issue of God being a non-contingent being, an uncaused cause, I find that so many times people have difficulties with miracles in the Bible. They read a miracle and they think that a scientific mind can't believe in those things. Here's what I do a lot of times. I just pause. Could you just do this? Could you just imagine a supreme being that could create all things in seven billion years? Could you imagine that? Sure. You probably could.

Could you imagine that he or she or whoever that supreme being is could do it in seven days? Yeah. How about seven seconds? The fact that you can imagine that is kind of a proof of the existence of God. It's called the ontological argument. But let's just say, just that part, you could imagine a supreme being that could create all things just by causing it to happen. Okay. Why is there a hang-up with miracles, then? Because if you don't think God can divide an ocean or walk on water, or if you don't think God could raise the dead, then you're not thinking about the God in the Bible.

A creator is not limited by his or her creation. Shakespeare has the license to completely change Hamlet, right? It gets to the end of the story, there's a giant swordfight, and King Hamlet

is back. He didn't die after all. He just got sick and he's better. Let's all hug it out ... and they live happily ever after. He could do that and one would read that book. But he has the prerogative.

So is the Creator with His creation, and He can do whatever He wants. I don't have problems with miracles when I remind myself, *If He can do this in seven seconds, He can do whatever He wants*. That's the end of the subject matter on God and His power.

### **Man Is Made in the Image of God**

What I'd like to do today is to look at the creation account and how it applies to the nature of man – anthropology. And particularly, the power of this phrase: in the image of God. Humans are in the image of YHWH.

Two books come to mind right away when I hear that man is in the image of God. The titles alone speak a lot about what the content is. Mortimer Adler, who is the chief editor for *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Great Books of the Western World*, wrote a book called *The Difference in Man and the Difference It Makes*. That says something.

G. K. Chesterton wrote a book called *The Everlasting Man*. And the point of both of these books – completely different styles of writing – they say this: that man is different in kind, not in degree. I love how Chesterton puts it. He says that the man in the cave is no caveman. And just because he's prehistoric and we look at his etchings on the wall as simplistic, they do not lack intelligence or sophistication. And then he says this: that you compare those cave drawings to what the Russians were writing on their walls as they were fleeing the Germans in the Great War and you'd see that the cavemen were smarter than modern day Russians. In other words, they did what they could with what they had.

Then he goes on to say this, that no advanced baboon has ever painted pictures on their walls, not for beauty, not for history, not for bragging rights. It's not within their nature. Man is different in kind, not in degree.

We are in the image of God, and that means a lot. Being human – this is dense, we'll talk about it next week – remember this, it will be on the test – being human is knowing our place in creation and being content with that place. Man in his design is in between angels and animals. We are lower case 'g' gods, and yet, we're still mammals. If you read Aquinas and Blaise Pascal and Reinhold Niebuhr, a more contemporary theologian, these men would say this: man's

dilemma is his uniqueness. Finding our place, our glory, being in the image of God, is also our confusion, because there is nothing in all of creation to compare to. So, here we are, stuck between angels and apes, and we're all alone. We're going to see how that plays out next week when we look at the fall.

But man is not like angels, he is not like other mammals. He is in the image of God. And two things happen by being made in the image of God, two things that distinguish us from all other creation.

### **Being in the Image of God Means We Have PURPOSE**

One is purpose. It means that we are in the image of God – that means we're rational. It means we need to learn. We want to know. We want to know for the sake of knowing. I don't get cable because there's a channel called Discovery Channel, and I'll watch that for twelve hours a day. I don't even know why, but I'll watch it. I just want to learn.

It means that we're personal. It means that we want to be loved and we want to love someone else.

It means that we're eternal. We crave everlasting. We need to last. We loathe death. No animal – this is just reflective on their part – they don't know that they're going to die. We do. And we want our lives to count. We want our lives to be remembered. We are like God in this: we have a vision for the eternal. We have eternity rattling around in our minds.

Man is creative. We just create things. We have to have beauty. And so, a four-year-old with watercolor, and that painting is thumbtacked to her bedroom door – that's greater than the most expressive mammal on earth. We create music because we can't live with noise, and so we put it into order. And angels sing.

We invented numbers and it changed the world. It civilized creation. We invented language and writing, and that changed the world and civilized all of creation. We were created ourselves with purpose. There's a purpose for our existence, and that purpose gives us purpose.

### **Genesis 1:28**

**Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.**

### **Genesis 2:15**

**The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.**

The passage says this: “Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’”

In chapter 2, the second creation account goes like this: “YHWH placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend it and to watch over it.” Think about that. In our creation God made us kings and queens of a garden that the King of the universe owns. In the purpose of our creation, He has us to be the priests of a holy and sacred place, all the while spending time with the great high priest. Adam’s devotions read like this: *Today I plowed the field and I planted corn. And then today I also harvested some plums that were ripened.* Because for Adam, work was worship and worship is work. It’s all the same. It’s all part of our purpose. It’s an expression of who we are.

John Milton wrote this in *Paradise Lost*: “The garden also operates as a divine sanctuary, the point where the immediacy of the divine presence was encountered and enjoyed.” The garden is when eternity takes on time and we share that with God. We are given a garden. It’s perfect but not complete, so we are to cultivate it. We are given a life that is beautiful and we are charged to make it extravagant. And in that we show ourselves to be in the image of God.

We have this in our own experience. We can’t help it. We are not like other mammals. We’re not like any other created thing. You put the child on the ground before they can even walk and they stack blocks. Later they’ll make Legos into something. And then when they learn to walk, you’re going to wish they didn’t have Legos, right? Maybe it’s just me.

A young girl, a young male – you’ll walk in on them sometimes in their bedroom and they are teaching baby dolls how to read. We make purses with sewing. And as adults we grow up. But when we make a meal, when we paint a room, when we close a deal, when we write a program, when we turn in a paper, we feel it in our souls and we say, *There it is. I made that. I did that. I’m a little like God. I’m in the image of God.*

We glorify God by practicing this purpose of reigning, of ruling. We show off the image of God with purpose. It’s as though God said this: *I have created humans to reflect my glory and this is how they reflect my glory: by showing my image – that is, my attributes and my love and my character.* While we rule, while we reign, while we are co-regents of all creation, what we are to do is, in our ruling, with our authority, we show the angels and the demons what the image of God is like. We get to show them in flesh what they can see in spirit. That’s purpose.

Eden is home. In the Bible, Eden is home. Here’s why this is so important. Because culture doesn’t have a place of origin. They don’t have a home. Ask around and you’ll see people that are misguided and you can ask them a fundamental question and you’ll hear them – they’re in *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice goes to the Cheshire Cat and says, “I’m lost, which way do I go?” And he says, “Where are you going?” And she says, “I don’t know.” And so, the cat says, “Well, then it doesn’t matter which way you go.” If you don’t know where home is, you can’t find it.

Ravi Zacharias quotes an Indian proverb: “There are an infinite number of ways to fall off a horse, but there’s only one way to stay on it.” You have to know where you’re from and where you’re going to have purpose. And our culture has no origin, and so they have no meaning. Here’s home. It’s knowing our purpose because we know our origin. It is knowing this; that we’re in the image of God; we’re not an accident. We’re purposefully made. We are designed to reflect the Creator. We are created in His image to project His image. Eden is home.

How do you get back there from here? That’s the key as well. By becoming like Christ in all of life. Let me say it another way – becoming like Adam or Eve in all of life. Let me say it another way. I hope this hits. Becoming like you in all of life, the way you were meant to be. When we talk about becoming like Christ – that’s what we’re referring to – and by the way, becoming like Christ in all of life is not like a vision that we got because we were assigned something from some person that says you need a vision for your church. Becoming like Christ in all of life – that’s almost every single epistle. We’re predestined to be conformed to the image

of Christ, that we are to be made perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. All of those are phrases to say like Adam, like Eve, before the fall; in the image of God, not bent, not broken. That's the general definition of what it means to be a man or a woman.

**Application: Do you know your specific purpose?**

Do you know your purpose? Do you know why you're here? Why you're not missing? I mean, think about it – how do you learn that? The first step is this for finding your purpose in life. Like particularly, not just generally like we've talked about, but particularly. Study the Bible – you study the Bible. In general, you find out what it means to be human. You believe in what the Bible says about that. Listen, this is the key – and obey what the Bible says. Obey what the Bible says. It is defining you as a human soul.

Then the second part – that helps every human know their place in general --- but in specific, you have to find God's calling. You have to find out how God has designed you and given you these special sets of gifts, and even experiences in life --- good ones and bad ones – to glorify Him by showing the world, demons and angels, and all that are watching, what it means to be in the image, reflecting back the image of God.

And in this experience, you have to know Him personally. You have to have an intimate prayer life so that you know the difference between His voice and your urges, between Him pushing you and your desires to stay back. You have to know how to sense the Spirit moving in your life. And last, you have to know the Bible of course; personally, you have to know Him; you have to have a vibrant prayer life. And you have to have a community of people, a very deep community of people that know you and that will tell you the truth. Everybody needs a Simon Cowell in their lives. There are too many people that don't have a Simon Cowell in their lives. That's why we're in the place we're in.

You have to answer this question, and the sooner you get it, the better. Why did God design you in this very special way? There's a wonderful movie and I bet a lot of you haven't seen it. It's older – it's called *Chariots of Fire*. And that's the theme of it – a missionary to China who also is a very fast human being and his sister is nagging him to get to work and get out on the mission field, and he won't go until the Olympics are over. And he says this to her: "I won't go until I finish, because God made me fast. And I feel His pleasure when I run." You finish that.

God made you ... blank. And you feel His pleasure when you ... blank. When you reflect the image of God, His particular image in you.

My wife likes to bake. She made a cake for a person at the Salvation Army, a little six-year-old, and I could tell --- she stepped back and looked at that and said, “There it is. That’s why I’m here. I bake. I bake cakes. I feel His pleasure when I put those candles on it.”

What’s your purpose?

### **Being Made in the Image of God Means We Have VALUE**

The second thing that you find in the image of God – you can read volumes of books – it means value. It means incomparable value. In C. S. Lewis’ famous sermon “The Weight of Glory” he says this: “There are no ordinary people.” Let me read this. “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations and civilizations – these are mortal because they will all end, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, and work with, marry, snub, and exploit – they are becoming immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. There are no ordinary people.”

And the consequence of value is that if you look at the history of justice towards people, for people that are weak or powerless, you’ll find this: that that justice finds its origin in the Bible in the creation story in this definition that we are in the image of God. If you look at the last 2,000 years, you’ll see it’s the Church that championed women; it’s the Church that championed orphans; it’s the Church that championed the weak; it’s the Church that championed the poor. It’s the Church that ended slavery. For no other reason, you should read *Jesus Skeptic* because this millennial – he is so fun if nothing else – and when you read it, you’re going to think, *Why doesn’t everyone know the history of the Church?* And I’ll tell you why – because there’s a spiritual war and evil does not want you to know. Evil wants you to stay ignorant of the power of the love of the Church, because the Church is what God is using to express himself in this life.

And he answers the question – I know what you’re thinking --- what about all the evil that has been done by the Church and by the leaders of the Church? And this is what I love about him – he’s such a millennial. He says this: that was not the real Church and those were not real Christians. I thought, *Yes, it is so refreshing!* I don’t know if he says it in the book – I haven’t gotten to that place yet – but he says it in an interview that I heard. He says, “Look, you can’t be

a real deacon of some church and you can't be a real deacon of some real church AND be part of the Klan." You've got to choose. Thank you. Say it out loud. And he did.

### **Application: We Value Every Life**

So, the point is this. The Church has owned justice because of this image of God and value. And so, we value every single life. And I bring this up on this Sunday because this is a very special Sunday. This Sunday is known as Sanctity of Human Life where, collectively around the world, churches are saying that every life counts. At the moment of conception, friends, at the moment of conception, even scientifically, you are given a new name. I mean, what if that genetic DNA strand is nothing more than a nametag from God and only He knows that name? We know that's a human life. And we know that a miscarriage or a stillborn or even an abortion has a grief and a weight that is not like other grief. And you can't pretend your way out of it, you can't ignore that kind of grief. It needs to be faced, it needs to be brought up, it needs to be talked through. And if you have that in your background or your experience and you find it's not working --- like, trying to move on -- would you please let us know at the church? We would love to be part of healing. One of the staff members is Melissa. You could just write the word "Melissa" down and then contact the church and she'll call you back. She wants to talk to you about what you might have experienced so that you could experience the fullness of grief observed and forgiveness received, if that's necessary.

This Sunday we usually take a huge offering. We are famously generous towards crisis pregnancy centers. And I want you to know we're not taking an offering this week, and I'll tell you why, because it's so exciting. There's so much happening at Austin LifeCare -- they've got a new name, they have a new city-wide director because the city-wide guy went to state-wide director, and the first time we could get the new city person was two weeks from now. So, we'll have a special offering. Bring your bags of money for that Sunday, because I want to introduce you to the new city-director of what's called The Source. We'll have a van out front and all that.

But let me go back to this. The reason we invest so highly in this organization and other organizations is because we want to be part of helping people make decisions that could affect the rest of their lives. And if you've made a decision -- and this organization, whatever decision you've made, whether to keep the baby or put the baby up for adoption, or terminate -- this

organization will carry the weight all the way through and help you. So will Grace. We want to help in whatever decision process there is. This is kind of a weird part of the conversation, right? I'm just asking you to hear that we cannot ignore the value of life and say it doesn't matter so that you could feel a little better. So what I want to tell you is this: truth will set you free. Let us tell you the truth. You acknowledge what took place and what's human life and you acknowledge the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ – forgiven and then set free. Let's have that conversation. That's what it means – sanctity of life – that's what it means.

And when we talk about value of life, we mean from the very beginning, everything in the middle, and the very end of life. You know, when you watch the people you love, your parents and people maybe you grew up with, and you watch them lose their senses and even their bodily control, it just crushes you. Because you can think for a moment they're losing their dignity, but they are not, because they are still bearing the image of God. And I'll say this. If you are part of, any part of, caring for the elderly, may God bless you. May God bless you in this life and may God richly bless you in the next life. If you are a receptionist, if you empty trash cans, if you are in the kitchen, if you are a nurse, if you serve in hospice, the whole world owes you. Because we can't care for people like you can care for people. We delegate it because we don't know what else to do. And so, if you serve in that context, if you've given a ninety-year-old man a shave for no other reason than so he would feel a little better about lying in that bed on top of that bedpan, God bless you, God bless you. I hope you feel His presence when you care for someone made in His image who can't for himself and his children can't care for him. God bless you.

That's what value means. That's what it means to be in the image of God.

William Bennett said this. It was a great conversation. William Bennett wrote *The Book of Virtues*, some great books back in the day. He was the Secretary of Education for Ronald Reagan. He used to do talk shows when he was in politics. And he was on one of these Sunday morning talk shows and he's with a gal, and you know here – she's a very famous journalist. And she turned to him with just a season of condescension and said, "Oh, Bill, you're a creationist, right? You think God created man – Adam and Eve." And he said, "Yeah." So he turns to her and says, "Look, here's what you believe. You believe that you are a product of a series of statistically impossible mistakes that run you back to swinging from tree limbs or maybe some kind of puddle. And that because of that you have no intrinsic purpose and you have

no ultimate value. When I look at you, here's what I see. I see that the God of the universe made you and He made you in His image and you have so much value to Him that He sent His only Son to provide eternal life for you. And He put you here for a purpose and that purpose goes all the way into eternity. So, yeah, I have a different view of you and everyone else."

I don't know if anyone's been hit so hard and complimented at the same time. She couldn't say anything. It was ... quiet ... cut to commercial. Get us out of here.

Do you appreciate your value? This is what the Bible says. It is rock solid. It is objective. It is irrefutable. It says that we are significant, that we have glory about us. Angels look at us and wish they could be like us, in the image of God. We are cosmically, infinitely, objectively valuable to God, no matter what we've done, no matter what we have not done. That is not the reason. We have value: ultimate value because God said so. And do you know what? He didn't just say so – He proved it. There was a ransom, there was a kidnapping. All of mankind was taken hostage. And what was the ransom?

*What do you want to pay, God, to get these humanoids back, these people, these image-bearers? What will you pay?*

*What will it cost?*

*Your son. Your only Son You love.*

And He paid. That's the value you have. And if you were the only person ever to exist, He would have paid that for you. You'd need a hammer and some nails, because you'd put Him on that cross. But He would pay for you. That's the value you have.

### **We Long for Eden -- Home**

Do you experience that value? You have to become like Christ in all of life. Around here one of the things we do is we guide others to become like Christ in all of life. We are convincing each other of biblical truth, value and purpose. And this Eden is home. We long for home.

Have you ever wondered why Norman Rockwell is so popular? Here's why I think he's so popular. It's because he paints Eden. He wrote this: "I paint life not as it is, but as it should be." And when we look at that painting of freedom from want, we think, *Yeah, that's what I want*. Even in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, it's not that pretty. And so, he made it that pretty. Rockwell painted Eden. And that painting is hanging in the halls of every soul.

And the image of God – we long for it. Every time we throw a coin in the wishing well, we wish there was more. Every time we see chaos and we turn it into beauty, we want it to hang on God’s refrigerator as it should. Every time we see something done with love and authority, we can smell Eden. If you pursue Eden, you lose it. If you pursue Jesus, you get Jesus and Eden.

## Conclusion

I love this church. I really do. I am proud of this church. This month I got into my car after a meeting – it wasn’t an easy meeting – but let me go back. Here’s why I love this church. Because for fifty years we’ve been personally and even budget-wise, highly invested in local and international missions. And while that’s true, we have made a dedicated choice multiple times not to be a church that is driven by a vision; we are driven by people. And the reason that’s difficult is that when you’re driven by a vision, people sometimes become a means and not an end. And if you look at the Bible and we’re in His image, mankind was never a means. We’re always an end.

I mean, I can throw a birthday party for my own child and when I get vision-centered, I’ll forget the child is even there. I’ll stomp him to get to that party and make it work. But we are a people-centered church. And we had a conversation with a couple that have been involved in multiple churches over the years, eighty years, probably, eighty years of combined ministry. And there was a part that needed to be fixed. They needed to become like Christ in this part of their life. And so, we talked to them, and they said, “You’re right, we’re wrong. And look at us – almost seventy, and we need to change.” And they are. And now they are more connected and more encouraged and growing more.

I got in the car and I called a friend and said, “I love this church, because whether you’re seven or seventy, you are the purpose. We want everyone to become like Christ in all of life.” All of us are in this journey further up, further in, until we get back to Eden. We are in the image of God. We were made that way. He gave us vision, He gave us purpose, He gave us value.

Why don’t you close your eyes. Let me just talk to you about that. It’s not a prayer, I’m just talking. When you matter to someone important, you realize you’re valued, right? When you matter to someone important, you find your identity by being that person’s friend, by being associated with them. We know this. And so, when we talk about identity, could we just not

think of that person, or, hypothetical, the only mind that really matters, God Almighty, is mindful of you. The great and ultimate mind is mindful of you. And until you trust in that, you'll never understand who you are and the dignity that you have. You are a work of art. God made you for a special purpose with special gifts and abilities and He wants you to reflect His glory. So, all the self-condemnation --- will you please stop interrupting YHWH and listen to Him? Go out in the night sky and hear Him whisper to you that He has crowned you like no other part of creation; that you are a little lower than the angels and you are way above any mammal. He gave His life for you so that you might have purpose and meaning and know your value.

*Lord, we are grateful for these truths in the Bible. And I'd ask that Your Spirit would help us go from maybe knowing it to understanding it to living it out. How great Thou art. You are such a great God. It is not within any requirement for You to love us or to care for us or to draw attention to us. But a sparrow falls and You weep. And You have numbered the hairs on our head. You know us like that. Lord, we find great consolation in You knowing who we are and giving us this great worth.*

*Lord, I'd ask that we would live that way; that we would guide others to understanding who they are, because they are image-bearers of the Great High King, the Creator of all things. We are yours. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*