

The image of God restored Part 1

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[0 : 00] Fearing in mind the passages that we read there in John's Gospel, chapter 3, which we're looking at slightly later on, a reminder that we're looking again today at God's image, or the image of God in mankind.

We've seen how, as it was originally when we looked at Genesis 1, that it was really good. It was tremendous, it was perfect, it was right. And then we saw in Genesis 3 how that image was tainted or perverted where things went wrong.

And that great passage in Genesis 3 gives us the root and the explanation for so many of the problems and troubles and unpleasant things that are happening in this world in which we live. It's God's explanation, his truthful explanation of why things have gone so tragically wrong. And that study into the perverted or the tainted image of God kind of must have left us bleak.

It certainly left me bleak as we look at the mess in which we've managed to get ourselves as mankind in this world. That we seem to have made a dustbin or a rubbish bin of this world in which God gave us.

[1 : 06] And that we've taken all that he has given us and we've used it against him. And we've used it in the wrong way. So that sin has kind of left us without hope.

It's left us with a mankind with a feeling of hopelessness and a feeling of desolation and a feeling of misery. And the story of people from beginning to end is as it was with Adam and Eve.

That they believed the lie of Satan. And that Satan has been telling that lie ever since. You shall not surely die. And people listen. And they believe that they're immortal.

And that death will not touch them somehow. And that Satan blinds them to the realities of sin. And the realities of the fall of mankind which has affected every single one of us.

But the feeling of the tainted image left us with a realisation or a recognition first and foremost of our need. That it is human beings as mankind and as womankind that we are born with a tremendous need.

[2 : 14] An emptiness and a lostness. That there's an aching void within every single living soul until that void is met in Jesus Christ. Young and old.

It is no respecter of persons. That we are born empty. We are born like shells. We are born without God. And incomplete. Not just that we somehow lost some of the good things that we had.

But we are now actually incomplete. We are not the way we were meant to be. We are one dimensional. We are flat. We are empty of God. And we are a nation and a people and a generation.

And a mankind. A whole race of people who search for satisfaction. And we try in lots of different ways to fill that hole that is inside us.

And sometimes things work for a while and satisfy us for a while. But always they drain away because that hole has got lots of little holes in it. Which means that everything drains away.

[3 : 16] And the only person that can fill that hole is God. So we have this need. This aching void that mankind generally has whether we recognize it or not.

Whether we see it or not. There's a search. There's a running around. There's a looking. And we see it all around us. We see it in the stock exchange. We see it in people going for houses and jobs and everything else.

There's a running around looking. An aching need that people are trying to fill. A thirst that they're trying to quench. The need is great.

But it's more than just the fact that we're born empty of God. Born hollow and shallow and kind of like a pea in a pod. It's worse than that because the need that God gives us in his word tells us that we are lost.

Lost immortal souls. That we are every individual person lost without Jesus Christ. Because we saw that sin brought in God's judgment and his curse. So we're born diseased.

[4 : 15] We're born guilty rebels. Not only do we have the original sin of Adam on our shoulders. And maybe we think, well, it's not very fair, Adam's sin. We didn't have anything to do with it.

We weren't even thought of. But nonetheless, as our representative, we are guilty because of the original sin that Adam committed. But if that weren't all, then maybe we would have a gripe. But we've also got our own actual sins to contend with.

The things that we do wrong. Our imperfections. The way that we fall short of God's perfect glory. Lost immortal souls. Tremendous need. Not only emptiness, but a lostness.

A lostness that means we're under God's judgment. Lost. Lost. With a hellish eternity to dread in the future. How can we describe it?

It's described in lots of ways in the Bible, but maybe it can be described as a place where there's no good thing. Can you imagine an eternity where there is no good thing?

[5 : 15] Nothing good. And that is the end of all by nature. That we are under God's wrath and curse. And that we will spend, if we don't fall in with Christ, an eternity where there will be no good thing.

For Christ will withdraw all his blessings and all his grace. And all the things that make us smile today. And there will be no good thing. So there's a great need that the fall brings out in every one of us.

You see, it's no fairy story that we tell from here. It's no fancy philosophy that we can take or leave. It's no cosmetic change that might somehow make you look better for a few years.

But rather, it's the deep, aching need within every living soul. The echoing cry for help that is in mankind as a whole. As in young, as in old, as in children, and as in the retired.

The lost, immortal souls. The aching void. And the need is furthered. It's made worse. It's made even more horrendous by the fact that we are completely unable to change things ourselves.

[6 : 25] We're completely unable to save ourselves. You look at mankind and we've tried lots of different things. We've even tried societies without God at all. Atheism, communism, as it has been tried.

But it's failed. We haven't produced a lovely society. We have yet to produce anybody that has managed to cheat death on the long-term basis. We are still a people that are dying.

And the world somehow seems to be getting worse. And the Bible is clear. That we can't save ourselves. That we're lost and that we're empty.

We're spiritually dead, the Bible says. Dead man can't live. Dead man can't rise. Dead man is condemned. We're broken. The image is gone.

There is no place for a self-service religion. Our need is total from our position, from our inability, from our aching emptiness.

[7 : 24] How can something that is dead give life? How can I, as a dead person, say, live spiritually? Because I can't. Death doesn't give way to life in these ways.

We have this inclination, every one of us. An inclination within our lives and in our society towards death. Towards decay. And I've yet to admit to anyone that has changed that inclination round so that we are aiming towards life.

So that we're becoming more alive. So that we're becoming younger and fitter. And if there is somebody, show me him and I'll worship him because that person is God. And that person is worth worshipping.

We can't cure ourselves. Remember what they said in the Bible about Christ. Physician, heal thyself. Because that was a well-known proverb. And we may shout that at one another.

But we can't do it. We can't heal ourselves. Be as daft as me telling this piece of wood here to preach. Come on, piece of wood, preach to this people.

[8 : 25] But it can't. Because a piece of wood is dead. We can't make a piece of wood an appropriate. However glorious and lovely and varnished it is, we can't make it preach.

Because it's dead. It's not alive. It doesn't have a heartbeat. Neither can we spiritually make ourselves alive by saying live. We need. We need. We need.

There's this tremendous need within ourselves that we can't satisfy in and of ourselves. The broken image drives us to recognise our need.

But I think that need brings us to recognise the urgency of the whole matter also. Not only is there a need, but there's urgency. The very fact that we need so much means that there's urgency about what we do.

That when we're here and when we're brought to see God and his word, that we are brought to recognise immortality. That we're dealing with immortal souls.

[9 : 26] That people outside are diseased and dying. And in here are diseased and dying. We're all diseased and dying unless we grasp to the only saviour who can give us life.

We're dealing with important matters in God's house. We're dealing with God opening his word and saying, Here is the way. Walk in it and you will live. We are dealing with the cure to these major matters.

Everlasting decisions that will change us one way or another for eternity. That is that there's urgency about our gatherings. Urgency means that it does matter how we live as Christians. It is important because it's urgent and the gospel is urgent. We are ambassadors for Christ. When we've taken on his name as Christians, we are standing for Jesus Christ.

And it matters. Because out there the people we touch and affect are lost immortal souls if they haven't Christ. So it matters whether you attract somebody to Christ or whether you repel them.

[10 : 33] It matters that we look with spiritual eyes. It matters if we zip our mouths and remain silent or if we tell about Jesus Christ. It matters where we go, how we act, what we say, how we react.

Whether we show Jesus Christ in our lives or not. It matters because we're making known to people that Christ means not a jot or Christ means everything to me.

It matters because we're showing forth to people who really matters in our lives. It's showing the reality of our faith or whether it's just a kind of sham, kind of coat that we put on when we feel like it. It matters because if people see how much Christ means to us, then we'll be able to tell them the great need they have. And if people don't see their need, they'll never come for a cure. There's no witness and there's no gospel gossiping.

There's nobody being saved. There's people being lost. I ask you as I have to ask myself. Would we not do so much for people who were in a burning room in a house?

[11 : 41] What would we do to them there? Would we not do all in our power to get them out? Would we not try and save them? Would we not tell them the danger they're in? Your house is on fire.

We wouldn't just walk away and say, well, it's okay. It's a fire. It'll not really affect them. As long as they believe somehow it'll escape. But we know that we would tell people if they're in ordinary physical danger.

But we've got a great reluctance. I have a great reluctance. Everyone has a great reluctance to tell people about their danger spiritually. Why? Because it's not as real to us. Because somehow it's not as important.

It's not as before our eyes. It's spiritual. It's something that, well, I suppose we believe, but really, do we? Do we believe our neighbors are lost? Do we believe we were lost? Do we believe we're saved?

We wouldn't do less. I'm sure nobody here would do less for a neighbor whose house was in fire. Will we not do more for their eternal well-being? It matters how we live.

[12 : 39] But it also matters how we preach. It does matter how we preach. There's no place for shoddy sermons and for weak sermons.

There's no place for enjoyable discourses that have not one ounce of spirituality about them.

There's no place for unprepared sermons spiritually. Sermons that have not been molded underneath.

Sermons that are not Christ-centered and Christ-motivated. There's no place. And that includes you and me. I need to be prepared spiritually.

And so do you. You need to prepare to pray that God will bless his word. That he will take his word and apply it to my heart and soul.

That we will pray, Lord, let me hear your voice today. Let me listen for the words of Christ. Pray for the devil to be immobilized. What is he like? He's hovering around.

[13 : 37] Remember we saw it before. And he plucks the word out. Plucks the word out before it takes root. Before it's any good. We need to pray against him. And how can we do that? Through

Jesus Christ.

Because he's stronger than the devil. Pray that the soil will be good soil. Pray that we'll be alert and awake to listen to God's word. Pray that the preacher will be given intelligence and brains and soul and heart for the gospel.

And for the needy and for the lost. Because there's potential in preaching. Great, immense potential. You know the potential that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That power is available through preaching.

And through our Christian living. Preaching and God's word and your own witness is tremendously important as is mine. And that is why we hate weak and ineffective and sappy preaching.

That does nobody any good. It talks about the birds and the bees and the flowers. But doesn't confront people with their lostness and with the way of salvation.

[14 : 43] That is why we are hurt by rejection. By people who say, yes, not today. Maybe some other time when I'm old. We're hurt by non-commitment.

That is why we're willing to look like fools as we stand here. And shout and plead. And dribble away to try and get the gospel across in the only way we know.

That is why we hate when people only consider church as an entertainment. As a club. As a tradition. As the upholding of a denomination. As a preaching station. As a bore.

As unimportant. We hate these things. Because these things show that people haven't got any concern for their souls. And for the gospel. Church.

Preaching. Ought to be thrilling. And chilling. Moving. At the same time has been exhilarating. And solemn. And frightening. Because spiritual realities are opened up before us.

[15 : 41] And we see people. Not as where they work. Or their businesses. Or their success. Or their bank balance. But we see them as either lost souls. Or souls that are safe in Jesus Christ. Real reality is unveiled before us.

As we gather together. And that reality. And that power. Can only be as preacher. And hearer.

Cooperate. In the gospel message. As you plead. And as I plead. As we work as one team. Not as a one man show. Not as looking to somebody else who's bigger and better than me.

But all of us together. Pleading and praying and working. Then we'll see the veil lifted. And we'll see our need. And we'll see the answer in Jesus Christ. That's why. When the vacant smile at the door. Sometimes there's a heart. It's aching. For your salvation. The answer. We find it. In John 3. The chapter we read. And throughout the Bible.

[16 : 43] For God so loved the world. That he gave his one and only son. His only begotten son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish. But have everlasting life. Probably the best known verse in the whole Bible.

We have the answer. In Jesus Christ. He is the one that will renew God's image. In us. And he is the one that renews it. In our hearts. Because Jesus Christ.

Is the last Adam. He's the last Adam. Remember we looked first of all. At Jesus Christ. At Adam. In the Garden of Eden. He was the first Adam. He was the first representative.

Well Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15. Romans 5. Tell us. That Christ. Is the last Adam. In other words. He is another representative. He has come.

In a similar way. To which Adam came. But we see. That that is where the similarity ends. Apart from the fact. That they were both human beings. God was more than that. Jesus Christ was more than that. But we see.

[17 : 39] Where Adam failed in the Garden. Christ. Didn't fail. The second time round. Where Adam disobeyed. Christ obeyed. Where Adam was there.

And gave in to temptation. And took of the fruit. Christ Jesus. In the wilderness. Did not give in to temptation. Did not turn the stone. Into fruit.

Or into bread. But he resisted. The devil's attempts. To make him fall. The same way Adam fell. Where Adam loved himself. Christ Jesus loved others.

Where Adam hid in the Garden. In shame. Because he was guilty. Jesus Christ. In the Garden of Eden. Came forward. Unashamed. To confront his enemies. Because he was innocent.

Where Adam lived a sinful life. Christ lived a perfect life. The last Adam. Completely different from the first one. And that inevitably. If we're thinking. Raises a question in our minds.

[18 : 33] Why Calvary? Why did he die? Jesus Christ. What did we say about death? We said that death came in as a result of sin. It was a punishment. It was the curse.

It was the horrendous separation of body and soul that was never meant to be. God's curse. God's judgment. Satan's work. Now Jesus was perfect.

Jesus was sinless. Jesus never did anything wrong. Death had no hold on him. He couldn't go to die. Death wasn't part of his kind of whole tendency. Because he was alive.

And alive. He had no sin. No guilt. God had no axe to grind with Jesus Christ. If we can speak of it in that way. Adam would have lived forever if he hadn't sinned.

Christ didn't sin. Why did he die in Calvary? He died. Because that's where the representation changes. Adam represented mankind. And we've all fallen on him.

[19 : 30] But Jesus Christ is more than a rep. He's more than a representative. Jesus Christ is a substitute. And that makes all the difference. That he is your and my substitute if we're Christians.

That he voluntarily said, I am innocent God, but I will die for the guilty. I will take their place. I will face their wrath.

I will drink all of the wrath that is due to them from God. I will take it upon myself. I will be their substitute. I will die a bloody death.

And I will face the wrath and power of hell. And what's more, if Christ had remained dead, we would have been utterly hopeless. What's more, he rose from the dead.

In other words, he not only took everything. He not only paid everything, but he defeated all the power of sin and death by rising from the dead.

[20 : 30] So that we can live with his life. We take Jesus' life and we make ours if we trust and believe in him.

Because he paid the price in full there, met God's requirement, took the wrath, took the death, took everything in our place, substitute and representative. When Adam failed, Christ succeeded.

He rose and he crushed Satan. That is why Calvary is. And that is why we believe. And when we believe in Christ, it's not like we need to work the rest of our lives to try and earn salvation.

Yes, we live the rest of our lives to serve him. But the moment we believe, the guilt is rubbed away. The price is paid.

Christ paid for it in history and time. Two thousand years ago. It's over. It's finished. And when Jesus Christ cried, it is finished. He meant it. So that the work is done.

[21 : 29] And it's there. And he says, all you need to do is believe. And it's for us to accept. Very briefly, why did he do it? He did it because he promised.

That's tremendous. One of the greatest things in the Bible. He did it because he promised that he would do it. He did it when he promised right in the very blackness of Satan's finest hour.

Satan's finest hour wasn't Calvary. Satan's finest hour wasn't when he made David fall. Satan's finest hour was when he made mankind fall. And he thought he had victory then. But in Satan's finest hour, God promised there that he would crush Satan's head.

And throughout these centuries until Jesus Christ came, the angels waited. And surely hell shivered at the prospect of how God would fulfill that crushing work.

And it was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Baby Jesus. Born in a manger. Born of a woman. Born under the law. Born without sin. And on the cross, he finished that work for all who will believe.

[22 : 38] And nobody else could do it. There's no other salvation. There's nobody else that had the power and the glory to defeat Satan.

To rise on the other side of death. And to take God's wrath. Who else? Can we not see the guilt we are under and the need if we don't accept Christ?

Can we take all of God's wrath ourselves? We take all of hell's curse. And we take all the judgment of eternal death. We're strong if we think we can do it on our own.

Because he promised. And because as this chapter tells us, because he loves us. The single most important fact in history is that as God looked down on a mass of sinful, lost humanity, young and old, teenagers, pensioners, married couples, and everyone else as he looks down on this tangled life, he loves.

And he loves enough to give his only begotten son. That is the only hope. It's the only answer for a world of hate and of horror and of insecurity.

[23 : 48] God is love. Not that God loves sometimes and that God loves now and again. but in his very character, God is love.

He sent his son to die on a cross for sinners. And you and I are sinners. And he did it to offer us eternal life. In that same verse, 316.

Surely it begins to take shape God's pattern, God's explanation. And we see in God, in Christ, that the pattern and the principle and the direction and the movement downwards into death and decay is changed.

And we move upwards into life and into everlasting existence. Is it not simply the best to quote a modern phrase?

Simply the best. There can be nothing else to match that gospel. Jesus Christ is simply the best.

[24 : 54] And I plead with people to seriously consider the gospel message and the pattern as it's laid down for us.

The claims of Christ, my Savior, who has given me life. And yes, we face death, but it's death without a sting.

Because just like Christ died, we too will die, but just as Christ rose, so will we. Because without Christ, there's a fearsome fear within my soul.

A fear of your lostness, of the condemnation that the Bible says you're under. Horrible fear of God's wrath. As a Christian, God's punishment or God's chastisement is hard enough, but his wrath is fearsome, pure and just, afraid of your future judgment, especially considering all the times you've heard and all the privileges you've had that countless millions haven't if you remain out of Christ.

It is urgent, and we are all needy. And if you're unmoved again, as I presume you will be, then I will pray to God and ask that you will pray to God to open your eyes spiritually, because no man can.

[26 : 25] And this evening, we'll see more of how the image in Christians is restored in the ways we've looked at already. Amen. Let us pray. Gracious God, we ask that you would take your word and that you would apply it to our hearts and souls.

The gospel message is relevant to us all, whether saved or unsaved. We need to be thrilled again by its glory. We need to be amazed and gobsmacked again by the fact that Christ loves us and that died for sinners.

We need to be shamed by our lack of love and service and rekindled in our admiration for his finished work. We need to again see the potential that there is and a waste of life and a waste of services and a waste of preaching when we prepare not spiritually.

And that these things oughtn't to be dry and boring and dull as they so often are. But we ought to be arrested by the power of God as he chooses to work through his word, not only preached but read in our homes, private and public, by the admonitions and by the words of other Christians.

And Lord, we ask for a day of power to return to us, not this day of meager emptiness and poor, shadowy living, but you would return us to days of gospel power and blessing when we see the power of the risen Saviour at work in our own lives, every single one, and our own congregation.

[28 : 04] Bless those who remain out of Christ. We ask especially for them as they remain on mercy's ground for how much longer, we don't know. we pray that their eyes would be opened and we give thanks, O God, for the people who prayed for me and for us, who are Christians when our eyes were shut and who prayed incessantly that we would see and be made to accept Jesus Christ.

And we pray for that faithfulness among ourselves to plead on and to pray on for the lost so that their eyes will be opened. for we are all in the same boat. None of us have any pride to act to grind or any road to walk other than the Calvary road.

For Jesus' sake, we ask these things. Amen.