

Genesis 1. Putting People in their Place

Introduction

Genesis 1 puts people in their place. It puts people in a very important place. Hear verses 26 to 28:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So 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 said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

A man named Max was begged by his friends to climb with them up a steep, snowcovered mountain. But he refused to move. "I'm against mountain-climbing," he said. Now his friends call him "Anti-climb-Max". You all know what an anti-climax is. You are watching a movie and you are expecting that it will end in an exciting way, but instead it is a fizzer, like a fire-cracker that doesn't go off but just fizzles out. What about the creation of what God calls "man"; what today, in our politically correct world, we call "people"? The creation of people is the climax of God's work of creation; the very last thing he does on the sixth and final day of creation. Is this a glorious, wonderful climax? Or, knowing how the wheels will soon fall off the car, should we call the man not Adam but Anti-climb-Max and should we call the woman, not Eve but Anti-climb-Maxine?

A few years back the Sydney Morning Herald devoted a full page to describe how Muslims were torturing Christians, usually Chinese Christians, in Indonesia. A Chinese Christian woman told of how Muslim males broke into their apartment, beat up the father, raped all the women in the family and killed two of them in front of the male members of the family. God said, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.*" Those Muslim males apparently thought God would be pleased with them because they kept shouting "God is great!" as they raped and killed. Did that make those Muslim males Godlike? When God looks at humanity does he feel a sense of anticlimax, that man is his greatest failure? To understand the place of people in the heart and mind of God we need to begin, as the Bible itself begins, by understanding God himself, the Conquering Creator-King.

1. The Conquering Creator-King

a. God the Creator

Genesis 1:1 tells us: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" What do you think if I reword this and say "In the beginning God created the universe"?

You may have seen *The Truman Show*. Truman grows up in a gigantic movie studio. He believes it is the real world. But when he looks up at the sky and sees the sun, moon and stars he is unknowingly looking at lights set in a huge dome. Ironically, ancient people grew up believing that the sky really was a massive dome. They didn't know about the difference between the earth's atmosphere and outer space. To them the clouds, the birds, the sun, the moon and stars were all located in the same massive dome - the visible heavens. They believed that above the dome were the invisible heavens where the gods dwelt.

Genesis 1 was written thousands of years ago. Put yourself in the shoes of ancient people. What would you understand when you heard the words: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth?*" God created the visible and invisible heavens and the earth. So we can reword verse 1 in this way: "In the beginning God created everything that is not

God." In other words, the Bible begins by making an absolute distinction between God as Creator and everything else which is created.

This means that anything other than God only has meaning, importance or worth to the extent that God gives it importance. The creation has worth and importance because after each day of creation we are told that God looked at what he had done and saw that it was good. And at the very end of creation we read: *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good"* (v31). So why is the environment important, why is creation important? Because God has given it this importance.

It is God who makes people so important, as explained in verses 26-28. God created us in his image, in his likeness to rule over the created order. We speak of rulers having blue blood. Everybody here, everybody you will meet today, and everybody you will meet this week has the blue blood of heaven running through their veins. Therefore, we must treat every one of these people with the same respect and honour that we would give to a king or a queen. Remember what we are told in James 3:9-10:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

There are people you find hard to like. Be very careful how you speak to them and about them. Ask God to help you to treat those difficult people with respect and honour.

b. God the Creator-King

God said, *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ..."* When God created people he created them to be rulers like himself. God himself is portrayed as a king in Genesis 1. In the ancient world a king could say in his court, "Let there be a public holiday this weekend" and it would be so: his courtiers would hot-foot it and announce to all in the land that this weekend will be a public holiday. Like an ancient king God says, *"Let there be light"* and *"there was light"* (v3). He says, *"Let there be a dome between the waters to separate water from water"* and it was so (v6). And so on.

In our world the government and the legal system are two different systems. If you don't like the way you've been treated in the law courts it's no use appealing to the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard. But in the ancient world, the king was also the head of the legal system. He was the Supreme Judge. After God creates light he assesses it as the Judge and gives his verdict. We are told: *"God saw that the light was good"* (v4). When God created the land and separated it from the seas, he assessed what he had done as the Judge and so we read: *"And God saw that it was good"* (v10).

God said, *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ..."* Ruling as kings and queens is at the very centre of what it means to be created in the image of God. God is the Great King and he has made us to be like him in this respect. It was common for ancient kings to leave a statue of themselves in lands they conquered reminding the conquered people who their real king was. When Mao Zedung ruled China his image, his picture, was to be seen all over China. It made it clear to everyone that Mao Zedung was the Chairman, the Controller, the King. In the same way, man is God's image. God blessed the man and the woman and told them to be fruitful and to increase in number, so that the whole earth would be filled with the evidence that God is the King of Kings. People only rule on God's behalf. It is when we reign in life, when we are in control of ourselves and our relationships, that we bring honour to Jesus as our God and King. Is there any area of your life which needs to be brought back under the Lord's control?

c. God the Conquering Creator-King

Right from the word "go" God wants us to understand absolutely nothing can stop him

from completing his purpose. So we are told in verse two: *"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* Here we have a description of the most terrifying environment imaginable for people. To ancient people this was a description of utter chaos. A surgeon, an architect and a politician were arguing about whose profession was the oldest. The surgeon said, "My profession is the oldest because Eve was made from Adam's rib and that surely was a surgical operation." "Maybe," said the architect, "but before that, order was created out of chaos, and that was an architectural job." "Ah," interrupted the politician, "but somebody created the chaos first!"

In the Bible the desert is a formless and empty place inhabited by dangerous animals. In the Bible darkness is not just the absence of light. It is a threatening and frightening force. And in the Bible the deep, that is the oceans, is the place of ultimate chaos. In the ancient world only crazy people would sail away from the coastline out into the deep blue yonder. When God created the earth he deliberately began with a state of ultimate chaos to demonstrate beyond all doubt that nothing could block his purpose.

Yes, we do read that *"the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep."* But at the same time we read *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."* God himself was present amidst the chaos and in complete control.

It's not hard to see why verse two is put where it is. Our sin reintroduced chaos into the created order. God responds with a work of new creation which conquers chaos over and over again. So we already know that the sin which breaks out in Genesis 3 cannot prevent God from fulfilling his purpose. God will create a people who are like him and through whom he rules. Nothing can stop him. The wonderful thing is that you and I have fallen into the mighty current of God's irresistible plan of salvation. My advice to you is don't fight it - let God have his way with you. As the current takes you let God knock you into shape as you bounce off the sharp rocks of hardship and disappointment.

When the American forces invaded Iraq in 2003 they did little to stop the looting which cost an estimated \$12 billion. Martial law was not declared and it was days before a curfew was imposed throughout Baghdad. Donald Rumsfeld was asked about this at a Pentagon news conference and replied, "Freedom's untidy. Free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things." There wasn't much evidence here of a conquest which brought order out of chaos; only conquest that brought yet more chaos.

In verses 3 to 25 we see God step-by-step conquering chaos. What is the first characteristic of chaos? It is an earth which is "formless and empty". On the first three days of creation God deals with the problem of a formless earth. On the fourth, fifth and sixth days of creation God deals with the problem of an empty earth. You will notice that days 4, 5 and 6 correspond to days 1, 2 and 3. Darkness is one of the great characteristics of chaos. On day one God begins to give form to a world oppressed by darkness. He says, *"Let there be light."* On Day One God begins to give form to the world by creating light and separating light from darkness. Remember Day Four corresponds to Day One. Look at verses 14 to 19 and see what happens on the fourth day of creation:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give lights on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.

You can see the difference here. On Day One that God gives form to a formless earth by creating light and separating light from darkness. But on Day Four God fills the earth with

many lights. Notice the sky is the place in which are set the sun and the moon and the stars. Ancient people did not see the universe in the way we do today. This was a time before aeroplanes and spacecraft and satellites. They made no distinction between the earth's atmosphere and what lies beyond it in outer space: it was all part of the same continuous skies. Verse 15 also tells us that God set the lights in the "expanse", that is, the dome of the sky, much like the dome that covered Truman's world.

In the same way on each day God's work of creation represents the conquest of chaos: giving form to a formless earth and filling an empty earth. Let's conclude by putting people in their place:

2. The Conquering Creature-King

Alexander the Great is renowned for his conquests. So was his father, Philip II of Macedon. His father had two servants each of whom had just one job to do each day. One man's job was to say to Philip each morning, "Philip, remember that you are but a man." The other man's duty was to say to him in the evening, "Philip, have you remembered that you are but a man?"

Genesis 1: 1 has established an absolute distinction between the Creator and everything else. To be created in God's image does not mean we are creators like God. No! We need to remind ourselves morning and evening that we are but men and women, just creatures.

Yet, as people created in God's image we are called to be conquerors like God. In verse 28 we read: *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."* That is: "fill the earth and conquer it." Here God is preparing the man and the woman to face threats and challenges and overcome them. In Genesis 3 one of the wild animals God has made, the serpent, poses this threat. But instead of conquering this creature the man and the woman are defeated by it.

The story of the Bible is the story of God enabling us to be conquerors. In Romans 8:37 Paul reminds us: *"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us"* (v37). He continues: *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus"* (vv38-39). It is those who are gripped by the love of Jesus, ultimately revealed at the cross, who become the conquerors intended by God when he created us in his image. It is such conquerors who cannot be defeated by anything "in all creation", because nothing can tear them away from the love of Jesus. In such is the image of God restored.

Having just spoken about Jesus as "the image of God" Paul flashes back to Genesis 1 to indicate the wonder of entering the knowledge of God: *"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6)."* We too were in a state of a chaos prior to this glorious work of new creation. In the context Paul is using these truths to highlight the importance of communicating the gospel to lost, sinful people such as we once were. For it is as we tell people about Jesus and what he has done for us that God will speak those words "Let light shine out of darkness" yet again and cause his light to shine in the hearts of many who now live in darkness and ignorance of our great God.

Let's put people in their place. We are the climax of God's creation. All people are created in God's image and must be treated with profound respect. Our sin does not make us the anticlimax even though it has reintroduced chaos into the created order because God is the conquering Creator-King, the God whose plan can never be thwarted, the God

who brings order out of chaos. Furthermore, those people who are transformed by God's work of new creation and are gripped by the love of Jesus themselves become conquering creature-kings.

I don't know what chaos is going on in your life at present. Make sure you take a good, hard look at God and, in particular, pray and think deeply about the immensity of the love of Christ. For it is when we are convinced that not even the worst experiences of life can separate us from the love of Christ that "we are more than conquerors."