**IT WAS VERY GOOD**

September 17, 2017

Genesis 1:26-2:3

Key verse 1:31 “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

In Genesis 1:1-25 we saw that God is the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth and all living creatures. This morning’s passage is about us, the creation of man. What makes us so special and unique among all the creatures that God made? And for what purpose did God make us? I pray that God may help you to know how great it is that he created you in his own image and that God may help you to see the blessedness it is to be the rulers of the world that he created.

**First**, God created man in his own image. (26-27). Look at verses 26-27. “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 had a great purpose to create man. Man is God’s crown of creation. That is, we are special to him and close to his heart, more than any other creature. God created man to be the ruler of all creation. Man has to be in control of his environment, not subject to it. But many people are slaves to fatalism, hopeless about their situation. They feel that they cannot do anything about their situation. They are not living according to God’s purpose for them. Joseph in the Old Testament was sold as a slave in Egypt. But he did not let his situation control him. He lived as a free man in his heart even though he was a slave, always working hard in his given situation by believing in God’s sovereignty. So he could become a prime minister in Egypt.

What then does it mean that God made man in his own image? It does not mean that we look like God physically. God does not have a physical body like we do. God is spirit. So when God created us in his image and his likeness, it means that we have many similar characteristics of God. Just as each of us bear the resemblance of our mother and father, and each of us have similar characteristics and habits from our parents, so we also bear the resemblance of God within us. This image makes us unique among the creatures that God made. What are God-like attributes we can find in man? Firstly, God is the Almighty Creator God. So man has creative ability. Man is the unique creature who invented a space ship to go to moon. Man has the desire to create things and to make things. Man has limitless possibilities. Secondly, God is an eternal God. So man pursues eternity. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” People long for something lasting. That is why many rich people donate their money to name the building after them. Thirdly, God is love. Love is probably one of the most misused word in English. When people hear the word, “love,” they immediately think of “Eros,” which is physical love. But God’s love is “agape,” which is sacrificial love. Jesus described this love in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Man has capacity for sacrificial love. Fourthly, God is holy. So man is holy. Man has holy desire. We want to see righteousness and justice being practiced. That is why we have a sense of right and wrong.

Because we have many God-like attributes within us and because we bear the image and likeness of our Creator, we have the desire to be like him. This is why man is called a religious creature. You never see a cat or an elephant worship God or even have desire to do so. This is because they do not have a spiritual nature; they do not have the image of God within them. You never see a dog or a cat struggle over their life problem. But we have God’s image in us and God’s likeness. So we have the need to know God. God gave us this need. Unless we seek God and fellowship with him, then we quickly become thirsty and empty and try to fill our spirit with material things and physical sensations and desires. St. Augustine said that every person has an empty space in their hearts, a vacuum, until they come to know Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.

But when we look around, it seems that man is not created in the image of God because the world appears very corrupted and violent. We do not see holiness in man. We do not see love in man. What happened? We will see in chapter 3 that something terrible happened: Man sinned against God. Sin is like leprosy. Leprosy causes man to lose noses and ears. It disfigures bodies until man looks so ugly and terrible to look at. Likewise, sin disfigures God’s image. Those who should look like heavenly princes look like monkeys who only look for bananas. Those who should like heavenly princesses look like beggars, begging for love. God sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins so as to restore God’s image in us. Romans 8:29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” In Jesus we have a glorious hope to be like Jesus.

**Second**, God created man for mission. Look at verse 28. “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.’” These words are God’s first words to man.

Firstly, “being fruitful” is God’s blessing. In Chinese character, the population is translated as “mouth to feed.” Many godless people today think of people only as mouth to feed. Then having children becomes very burdensome. But the Bible says that it is God’s glory to be fruitful. More important than eating, people praise God with their mouth.

Secondly, we see that there is a clear, harmonious spiritual order built into the universe: God first, man second, and created things last. This order of creation was established to make a beautiful world that would glorify God. These days, many people do not keep the spiritual order. Then misery follows as a result. There is a couple in Hong Kong who studied the Bible with us many years ago. The husband worked 90 hours a week in a bank, and the wife complained that he did not spend enough time with her. Then he said, “My career is more important than you right now.” So she was hurt and moved out. He put his career ahead of his relationship, not to mention God. Then he repented, and now he is putting God first. Their relationship was restored and they are happy.

Thirdly, man has a definite mission for which God created him. No one is happy until he finds the purpose of life in God. Even Madonna made this statement a while back: “I think a few years ago I wasn’t sure what I was on this earth for. I think I was mostly concerned with getting things for myself. More clothes, more money, more popularity and more boyfriends. I wasn’t really thinking; I was just doing. Then I woke up and said, ‘What am I on this earth for?’” Sooner or later we begin to ask the big questions: What is the meaning of life? Why am I here on this earth? Why do I exist? What should my purpose in life be? We all have in us a desire to achieve something, to make something of our lives. We all want our lives to count for something bigger and better than ourselves. It is because God made us for a great purpose. There is something that God has given him to do in this world. We can say that man=mission and mission=man. No matter what we are called to do, we must not let what other people think of us influence too much. We must seek to accomplish the mission that has been given us by God. God’s mission does not have to be glamorous. God uses ordinary people to do small things for God. Mother Teresa said, “God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful.”

Fourthly, paradise was a place of hard work. If one would fulfill his mission he must work hard. So the person who does not like to work is giving up his divine right as a human being. Adam had to work hard by taking care of the garden all by himself. The paradise was not a place for lazy people to loll around. Yet, many people think of paradise as vacation spots like Bahamas or Hawaii. To them work is tiring and burdensome. Why? What is the difference? The work Adam did is different from the work we are doing. There are millions different jobs in the world. But one thing is common. Namely, it is to make money and eat. As we will study in chapter 3, since man sinned against God, God cursed man to work for food. When we work for food, it becomes so tiring and weary. But Adam’s work was not for food. Food was given freely. He worked for the glory of God. When man works hard to fulfill God’s mission instead of working hard for himself, he is happy and God provides what he needs for his physical life. On the other hand, when man ignores his mission and only struggles to survive, he becomes full of fear and his life becomes meaningless.

Then what is our mission in this fallen world? Jesus gave us the great commission and told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation (Matthew 28:19,20). We see here similarity between Genesis 1:28 and Matthew 28:19,20. In Genesis 1:28, God gave man mission to subdue and rule over, namely to maintain spiritual order. But the spiritual order was broken when man sinned against God. People live miserably without the spiritual order. Our mission today is to bring people to Jesus Christ and help them live in the kingdom of God under his reign.

**Third**, it was very good (31). Look at verse 31. “And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.” God created the heavens and the earth and all things, and after each day’s work, “God saw that it was good.” But when he finished creating man on the sixth day, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” The adverb “very” is added. There are two meanings that we can find here. Firstly, God is saying that of all his created things, man is the creature in which he has special joy. Secondly, God thinks that each of us is the best, and very good. We are all objects of God’s glory that God purposely made. No one can say to us that we are not good. Once when Jesus’ disciples saw a man who was blind from birth sitting along the road and begging, they asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” This man was born blind because God had it in his plan to do so. God wanted to reveal Jesus to the world through this man when he healed this man’s eyes and helped him to see. To the world, this man was not good. But to Jesus, he was very good.

So we do not need to worry about what others think or say about us. The important thing is what God says about you and what God thinks about you. Because God loves us absolutely we can say that we are very good. We can especially experience this when we use our lives for his good purpose. We must keep this truth in our hearts. We must realize that out of the 7.5 billion people in the world, God made each of us with a special nature and character and gave a special meaning to each life. It is a wonderful thing to discover one’s self. When I believed that God made me and was very pleased, then new possibilities appear for amazing and wonderful self-discovery and great self-fulfillment. I began to find the real joy of being human.

**Fourth**, the Day of rest. (2:1-3). God worked hard for six days and God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. On that day, God rested. God gave the Sabbath day to man as a day of rest. The Sabbath is a holy day. “Holy” means “set apart” or “different.” God set the Sabbath day apart from all the rest of his creation and gave it to man as a day of fellowship with God. What do you think Adam did on the Sabbath? Did he sleep all day or watch TV all day? I think God took him around the Garden of Eden, talking and enjoying beauty of the garden. If there is no rest through fellowship with God, man withers. The word “Sabbath” means “rest.” On the Sabbath, we must stop doing worldly things and go to God for a new filling of spiritual strength, love and joy. We can receive God’s love and strength from him by studying the Bible and praying and by serving God and his sheep. People of our times have forgotten the law of the Sabbath. As a result, they are overflowing with tiredness—even though they have many long weekends and holidays. But Christians must keep the Sabbath holy and on that day have deep fellowship with God. In this way, we show the world that we are God’s people. Exodus 31:13 says, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must keep my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’” Keeping the Sabbath is a sign of being God’s people. By keeping the Sabbath, we keep the spiritual order by giving God the first place in our hearts. What if a Christian skips a worship service when he has an exam on the following Monday? It shows that he is not putting God first in his heart, and he is not trusting in God. His unbelieving friends will think that he is no different from unbelievers. In this way, God is not honored. May God help us to honor God by keeping the Sabbath.

In this passage we learn that we were created in God’s image and to take care of the world in which he created. God wants us to grow in his image and accept his purpose. May God help us to grow in Jesus’ image by earnestly seeking him and proclaiming his word. When God made each of us, he said, “It was very good.”