

Who Are You?

What Does the Bible Teach?

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Again, it's just a delight to have everybody here and to welcome you to the preaching of God's word this morning. For those of you that perhaps haven't been with us for the past few weeks, we're laying a doctrinal foundation for the future of our church in the series that we're teaching. We're kind of going through various key questions that set the structure upon which our church will be built for many, many years to come. We're addressed questions like, "Why do we believe the Bible?" and "Who is God?" and "What is the Trinity?" and last week we considered the question, "Who is Satan?" and that leads us to a different question to answer here this morning as we continue on in a consideration of what the Bible says about life and men and salvation.

When you meet someone for the first time, you explain to them a little bit about who you are. You say something like, "Hello, my name is Dan Logan. I'm a dentist in Indiana." Or you might say, "Greetings, my name is Alan Sherman and this is my wife Christy." You give little pieces of information that answer the question, "Who are you?" for someone that is meeting you for the first time and you give distinguishing pieces of information that distinguish you and identify you as opposed to everyone else. That's appropriate; we do it all the time. It's the only way that relationships can be started. We have to figure out where each other fits in the scheme of things. But when you think about the question, "Who are you?" that question can and actually must require a more thoughtful answer than simply what it is that we do or who it is that we have family relationships with. Who are you? Is the question. Where did you come from? Why do you exist? What happens when you die? is really the fundamental question about who are you, who you are, and those are questions that are not so easily answered. Yet, beloved, they go to the very foundation of living a productive Christian life in understanding our role in the universe.

One Bible scholar named Laird Harris said this, "If man is what the Bible says he is, he cannot know himself meaningfully apart from God." If we do not understand, if we are not consciously framing our worldview from the perspective that we were created by God and that we are, therefore, accountable to him, if we are not conscious of the fact that as we live this life, we are living a time of a brief window of time, we are mortal and frail beings, then we're going to be completely skewed in the way that we approach life. We're not going to live life according to truth, we're going to live it according to a false construct that leads us to squander the one opportunity that we have.

Who are you? Really, theologically, we're asking the question: what is man? What is man? What is the human race? Where did we come from and where are we going? And to answer that question, I'd invite you to turn to Psalm 8 which is going to be our primary text for this morning. Psalm 8 as we consider the question, "Who are you?" What we see as we answer this question biblically, "Who are you?" is this: the answer to that question that gives us significance is not what distinguishes us from everyone else, rather what gives us eternal significance is what we share in common as a human race. I can't help but mention the fact that I go to cemeteries quite frequently, I walk through cemeteries and there is something about the passing nature of life that that reminds me of that has a sanctifying influence on my thoughts and if you've ever walked through cemeteries, older cemeteries in particular, you notice something about the way they

inscribed cemeteries in the 19th century and 100 years ago. They would write and they would inscribe things of eternal significance. You can tell the tombstones of Christians because they are quoting Scripture or they are bidding the one who is looking at the tombstone to contemplate their eternal destiny. They'll quote John 11, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall never die," and things of that sort. What I've noticed and this interesting and this is all tied into the message today, it helps to frame the way that we think about the answer to our question this morning. You go to cemeteries these days and you're far more likely to see things that are inscribed on tombstones that are somehow representative of the life that that person lived and so you'll go and you'll see a tombstone, I could take you to places, where they have pictures of their house or their motorcycle or other things like that and that is the imprint on their tombstone. I want you to think about the significance of what that means and the contrast with what was done in times gone by. It's saying that, "What made my life significant was the things that I did. What I want you to remember is the things that were associated with me," and it's tragic. It's tragic to realize that in the face of life and death, in the face of the last thing, testimony that is given, either that person or that person's family has chosen to simply represent that which was passing and temporal in their lives. You go and you look at it from any kind of biblically informed perspective and you say, "This is so superficial. This is so transient." This acts like the thing that gave life its significance is what happened during the course of that person's 60-70 years.

Do you see the issue? In the face of death, in the face of stepping into eternity, people want to remember their house and their shingles and their motorcycle. Wow. How far off track that is and yet how natural it is when we're taught that we've evolved from animals and this life is all that there is, of course, that's what you would imprint. What I want you to see is that what has become a shift in cemetery tombstones is a reflection of a failure to answer the question, "Who are you?" It's a failure to recognize what makes life significant, what it is that makes us significant as human beings. Go through a cemetery and if you haven't noticed this, take some time and go to a modern cemetery and you'll see what I mean and you'll recognize it and when you see and look and think about what that is saying, what a tombstone is saying about an approach to life, you realize how desperately off track our thinking is.

Who are you? We need to answer that question. I'm going to give you four principles to help you answer that question here this morning. First of all, you must start answering that question from this perspective: 1. You are a creature. You are a creature. Beloved, you cannot, no one on the face of the earth can look at their life as it now exists and accurately define who they are. You must start at the question of origin. You can't say who you are unless you know where you came from. If you answer the question of origin incorrectly, everything else is askew and that, of course, was part of the issue that was identified in the debate that took place on this stage earlier this week. The whole question of origin defines the human race and we need to define that question accurately. Psalm 8 does that for us. We have an inspired word from the living God which tells us where we came from.

Psalm 8, beginning in verse 1. I'm going to read the first five verses here.

"1 O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! 2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease. 3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? 5 Yet You have made him," there it is, You have made him, God, you have made man, "a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!"

Now, one quick word about Psalm 8 that I'll just mention in passing is that Psalm 8 does not address the fall of man into sin. It is addressing man as he was created to be. It doesn't deny the sinfulness of man but it is defining man in terms of who God created him to be and thus focuses on the positive presentation of the human race. So that's the perspective from which we're going to answer the question here this morning. We'll save the issue of sin for next week.

But here's what I want you to see, beloved, when we think about our lives, when we think about walking through this world, where we came from and where we are going and who we are right here as you sit in the audience here today and as I stand before you speaking, what I want you to see is this, very simple point but utterly profound and life defining: the Bible defines you in the context of the knowledge of God. Unless we know the God of the Bible, we don't know who we are. That is the whole starting point of defining who man is and the Bible quickly takes us to an exalted view of God when it contemplates who we are. Look at the verse with me again there in Psalm 8:3. Notice where David is starting from here, he says, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained." He's contemplating God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He's looking up at the night sky and from that perspective seeing the greatness of God on full creative display and he turns and looks at himself and says, "I am so small and creaturely by comparison." God, this is how you answer the question, "Who am I?" This is how you think rightly about yourself in the content of the universe. You start by contemplating the one who made the heavens with his fingers and you realize that that same Creator made man and you are a subset of the human race. You are a member, maybe that's better stated, of the human race who was created by this God who created the heavens. That's the starting point. Any other starting point is not only wrong, it is satanically wrong and designed to lead us astray. We don't contemplate our own existence without first contemplating the existence of God.

The existence of the God of the Bible, that is the starting point for all human knowledge and that is the starting point for knowing who you are. We don't define ourselves primarily by the job that we do, by the family that we have, by the activities that we enjoy. That's the mindset that imprints a motorcycle on a tombstone. We're mindful of the fact that we were created by an eternal God. We are mindful of the fact that that has implications and we define ourselves by looking first to the heavens and then reasoning from there and the fact that there is a Creator means that, the fact that the Scriptures say, "God, you made man," means that you're a creature. You're not independent. You don't have an independent existence; you don't have an independent prerogative. The fact that you are a creature means that you and I have responsibilities to the one who created us. As soon as you contemplate yourself vertically, you realize that your life cannot be about primarily you, it is about you living in light of the one who created you.

We are creatures. We are the objects of care of a Master Creator and, beloved, here is where that leads us: what is the spiritual impact upon your life of being a creature? Psalm 8 answers it for us at the beginning and at the end. Look at verse 1 with me again, he says, "O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth." Look at verse 9, "O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!" At the beginning and at the end of this Psalm, he is worshiping, he is declaring the majesty of God and that has an interpretive significance to this Psalm. The beginning of this Psalm is worship; the end of this Psalm is worship. That means that everything designed in between, everything written in between those two bookends, is designed to cause you to worship as well and so, beloved, when in the midst of that context of worship David says, look at verse 5 with me again, he says, "You have made man a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!" The premise is that that leads him to worship. He contemplated that God is the Creator, "Ah, that means you made man. Ah, that means we worship you in the majesty of your name." You see, when you understand that fundamentally you are a creature, that means that God created you. That means that your primary obligation in life is to return worship to the one who gave you life. That is the defining principle of your self-understanding, your self-image, that my duty first and foremost begins and ends with the worship of the one who made me.

God created us, we praise him. God created us, we give him our allegiance. Psalm 139, we won't turn there but you can just jot this down in your notes if you're taking notes. Psalm 139:13-14 says this and it's a familiar passage, speaking to God, the Psalmist says, "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works." Do you see it? There is this recognition that from the very moment of our conception, this God of the Bible, this Creator God, was intimately involved in forming us into the people that he wanted us to be and in the context of recognizing that, the Psalmist says, "I'll give thanks to you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." What is the spiritual impact of being a creature? Your fundamental outlook on life is defined by the recognition that, "I owe a responsibility. I owe a duty, a glad duty, of gratitude and thanksgiving to the one who made me. I did not make myself." There is no such thing as a self-made man.

Scripture says, "If you have something, you need to understand you received it. What do you have that you did not receive?"

So this understanding that we are a creature immediately crushes our sense of pride as if our attainments in life were something that we did by the power of our own hand and it places upon us, it puts us in a context where we recognize, "I have a duty of gratitude to the one who gave me life. I have a duty of dependence upon the one who sustains me. I have a duty of worship to my Creator." That is the obligation that a creature has to its creator, "I must worship the one to whom I owe my existence." Who are you? You say, "I'm a creature. I'm a creature and that means that I owe allegiance and gratitude to the one who made me." That's the starting point of understanding who you are.

Now, as you continue on as we think about these things, there is something wonderful about this as you consider your origin, as you consider your source of where your life came from: if the God of heaven, if the God of creation is the one who made you, point number two becomes very evident and it's this, it's that you have dignity. You have dignity. Scripture teaches that God bestowed on man a special nature that distinguishes him from every other living thing. Psalm 8, as I said earlier, passes over the fall into sin, the chaos of sin, and it teaches the place that man has in the universe and we're going to see as we consider the dignity that we have as created men, I want to show you four subparts of this dignity that we have.

First of all, you have dignity. When I say "you" we're talking about as members of the human race. You have dignity first of all, in the created order. In the very created order, in the very structure of the universe, there is a particular dignity given to man. Man, we could state it differently, has a distinct place of honor in God's created order. Look at Psalm 8 with me again as we pick it up again in verse 5,

"5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!"

He's speaking about the dignity that God has bestowed upon the human race. Verse 6,

"6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, 7 All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, 8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas."

God has put man at the pinnacle of his created order Scripture teaches. In Genesis you see this. In fact, let's turn there, Genesis 1:26. We're talking about the distinct place, the distinct dignity that man has in the created order of God. Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" Let them rule. Let man rule over the rest of creation. Verse 27, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." You say, "But Pastor, that was before the fall. What about after the fall? What did sin do to that?" Well, even after the fall, God reaffirmed man's position in creation. Look at Genesis 9:1, after that worldwide flood. This is after sin, after the world was judged in the flood, notice this, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'" There is a creation mandate there. Verse 2, "The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant." God handing over to man, reaffirming his position in creation. Man has a place of dominion in the created order.

I like to think about it this way on this point, the position of man, the role of man in the created order: we put animals in zoos not vice versa. There is a reason why it's done that way, it's because man rules over the animal kingdom, not vice versa. An animal rights activist, PETA, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, violate the created order, God's created order, when they elevate beasts to our level. I don't know if you saw the story; they are starting to do this more and more. I saw stories like this in California and I read about this recently. I think it was in the state of Georgia where the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals have petitioned the state for permission to establish a monument in memory of a group of chickens

that were killed when a chicken truck was overturned in an accident and they are serious. Now, you say, "That's nuts," and I'm inclined to agree with you. What I want you to see is the theological problem that underlies that, the worldview that underlies that. While that sounds so crazy to biblically informed ears, what I want you to see is two things: 1. and you understand this, this is where the thinking of evolution leads you. Man is knocked off of his place of dignity in creation and we share a nature with chickens so that if a group of people die in an accident, you put a monument there. If a group of chickens die, you put them there too. I think in California it was a group of fish that were killed that they wanted to do this for. So we're reduced to the level of roosters when this teaching is denied that we're looking at here today and what I want you to see is that there is a theological reason behind that. They do not see the distinct dignity that man has in the created order. If there is no God, man is not endowed with unique dignity. If we give memorials to men, we give them to animals as well. There are practical consequences to this.

Now, you also have dignity. You have dignity not only in the created order but you have dignity because you were created in the image of God in a way that is utterly distinct from animals. How great is the dignity that belongs to the human race? How great is the dignity that belongs to us as human beings? Man reflects the likeness of the God who created him by divine order, by divine appointment. Man is created on a divine pattern which gives him the capacity to think with reason, to have personal relationships and that bestows on him moral responsibility in a way that animals do not share. Man thinks with reason, animals do not. Man has personal relationships, animals do not. Man has ethical accountability, animals do not. There is a distinction in the human race for being created in the image of God that gives us a proper way to contemplate our place in the universe. There is a dignity to being a man. There is a dignity to being a woman. There is a dignity to being a member of the human race that animals do not have. We have something that God gave to us that he gave to no other aspect of creation.

So for people that wonder where their value comes from, here's the value in being a man or a woman: it's the fact that you were created in the image of God. That's what bestows value upon you and I want to say something here, I'll probably get into this a little bit later as well, but this is something that is shared in common by the human race and that means that we have a sense, whether we are meeting a President or whether we are meeting a share-cropper someplace in a poverty stricken portion of Africa, there is a sense in which we bestow dignity of equal value to each one because of the image of God that is related in them. This destroys the sin of partiality in our thinking and in our interactions when we understand that every human being shares in the image of God.

I remember one time walking into a restaurant and I had been thinking about these issues and there was this homeless man that was camped out in the place that I normally wanted to sit, this is far away now. As I was thinking about this and this unrepresentable man, so to speak, was there and it occurs to me that that man whom I would have been prone to blow off, somehow he represents the image of God and so I didn't introduce myself, I just nodded and politely said, "Hello." The significance of that was that I was acknowledging, recognizing, the image of God in him. That's what this teaching does. It keeps you from having a condescending attitude toward people who are otherwise lower on the social scale, you realize, "We share the image of God together. The least I can do is nod in your direction and acknowledge your presence." It was a rebuke to my heart to realize that I wasn't naturally inclined to be that way. The pride in a heart that would blow someone off because of that. Now, I'm not suggesting that young single women should engage homeless people on the street, that's not the point of this. It's simply the mindset that we bring to how we react with people around us.

One other aspect about this when we think about the dignity that we share as being members of the human race: you and I do not have an independent dignity that is based on who we are or our works or our accomplishments, you and I have a conferred dignity. The Creator has conferred dignity upon our human race. We don't have dignity in and of ourselves. In that sense, you and I are like the moon. The moon has a peculiar brilliance in the night sky but without the sun, it would just be a big ugly rock in space. It reflects the glory of the sun but it has no inherent glory of its own. That's the way we are. We reflect the glory of the one who made us in his image but we don't have an independent, apart from God, dignity an value and worth. All of our dignity and value is derived from the one who made us and so while we recognize the dignity, it completely humbles us at the same time.

Now, that dignity has implications for our relationships as well and so we share dignity, we have dignity in the sense that we are created in the image of God, that we are made, as it were, in the created order. We have dignity in the created order, dignity as made in the image of God and thirdly, we have dignity in human relationships. It impacts our human relationships and this is what I was kind of addressing a little earlier. Why is it that murder and abortion and cursing are sins? Cursing others? Why is it that taking the life of another is a sin? Evolution can't really answer that question in a satisfying way. The biblical doctrine of man explains it perfectly. Look over at Genesis 9:6. It says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For," here's the grounds for capital punishment, here is the reason why murder is sinful. It's not primarily because it's a man-on-man sin, it is a violation. It is an attack on the image of God. Look at verse 6 with me again, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For," there's the reason, "in the image of God He made man." It's as if God says, "How can you attack someone I made in my own image? Where do you make that attack against me? You are a creature. You are attacking one made in my image? That is guilty. That brings great guilt to bear."

You say, "Well, okay, I never commit murder so I'm good here." Well, look over at James 3 where the same reasoning based on the image of God, implies to a sin that we are far more prone to share in. James 3:8, addressing the tongue. James 3:8, just after the book of Hebrews, "No one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." Those verbal attacks on other people are verbal attacks on the image of God. Scripture says that the cursing is wrong because you are cursing one made in the image of God.

So this changes the way that we look at everyone around us and so let me say this: when men degrade themselves with immorality, when as has happened in my extended family, when a man stumbles to his death in a drunken stupor, it's more than a personal tragedy that we see unfolding before us. When we see people degrading themselves with their public acts and displays of immorality, when we see drunkenness and all that around us, we need to think about that theologically and realize that this is more than a personal loss, a personal tragedy that has taken place here. What should really grieve us as Christians is the fact that, "Oh, I'm seeing yet another perversion of the image of God on display." A drunken man stumbled to his death; he was perverting the image of God while he had breath and then look at this outcome. This was not the design. This is not the way it's supposed to be and as one who loves the living God, you look at that and say, "This grieves my heart." It's not just because it offends my ethical sensibilities; it's not just because it's developing an environment in the world that I don't want to see passed on to my children. You look at this and say, "This is a violation of the very purpose of man," and you go and you humble yourself before the Lord and you say, "O God, won't you send a powerful revival on these people who need Christ? God, won't you do a work in my heart because I, myself, fall short of the fullness of displaying what the image of God should be in my own life? O God. O God, man is not what he's supposed to be and it grieves me, Lord. Not just for the sake of my own sin but because your image is being distorted by what's going on."

Now, there is a final aspect of the dignity that belongs to us as men, as members of the human race and this is the greatest dignity of them all. This is the most wonderful aspect of the dignity of being a man, that no one else in creation anywhere could ever share. This is a glory that transcends the glory of the sun. This is a glory that transcends the glory of the night sky. This is the glory that transcends everything else, that the lion and the king of the jungle could never aspire after. We share a dignity that no one else does, that nothing else does in this: the supreme dignity of the human race is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Lord Jesus Christ. We won't look at these passages but the New Testament applies Psalm 8 to Christ in 1 Corinthians 15, in Ephesians 1 and in Hebrews 2. Here's what I want you to see in this: the Creator himself became a man. You and I as members of the human race share in the nature that Christ himself took upon himself in the Incarnation. The ultimate dignity that was bestowed upon the human race was when Jesus Christ became a man and walked on the face of the earth. God, holy, pure, majestic, transcendent above time and creation and history became a man. We have one like us in heaven. The dignity of the human race finds its true expression, its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ who came in flesh to redeem men from sin and do you realize that dignity is going to be further manifested when Christ returns to earth and personally rules over creation as a man? The total absolute dignity of Christ, the total majestic worth of his character and he stepped into our nature. He took on human flesh. We share in the nature that Christ himself shares in only he doesn't have the sin of it. No lion, no chicken, no fish, no star, not the most magnificent

astronomical thing shares that kind of glory and yet Christ became a member of our race. The holy Son of God has a nature like ours excepting the sin of it. That is the ultimate dignity bestowed upon the human race.

Now, we're answering the question, "Who are you?" We said that you are a creature and you are a creature with dignity because of the manifold ways that the image of God displays itself out in the human race. Thirdly, shifting gears here into a different aspect of who you are, thirdly, you are mortal. You are mortal. You are frail. Go back to Psalm 8 with me for a moment. Psalm 8:4, David says, "What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?" The word for "man" that he uses there is a word that suggests the frailty of man. For all of your dignity, for all the dignity that we share, we're mortal. As we read earlier in 1 Peter, that the flower falls off, we're like a fading flower, a mist in the wind. You will soon pass away. "Soon" defined either in a matter of days or "soon" defined in a matter of years. It doesn't matter. Compared to the backdrop of eternity, it is a wisp of time.

I realize how uncomfortable it is for some of you to think about this and so I speak with gentleness and love in my heart but we have to consider this. Turn to Psalm 103:15. You cannot think rightly about your life at all unless you contemplate this. Psalm 103:15, actually we'll start in verse 14, "For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust," and the way Scripture puts those things side-by-side, created in the image of God with dignity and ruling over creation and yet man is but dust. This is part of how we have to understand a balanced view of ourselves and in verse 15 he goes on and says, "As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer." You are made in the image of God and yet you are mortal at best.

Whenever I think about this, I always think about that grainy video from November 22, 1963. President John F. Kennedy riding in his motorcade, riding as the most powerful man in the free world, the most powerful nation arguably in all of the world. And adoring crowds calling out to him, straining to see him and they make the turn down the street and the assassin's gun ends it and like that, the most powerful man in the world is reduced to facing eternity in a moment. Well, beloved, if that can happen to the President, how much more mortal must we be? People die in accidents all the time and even the most powerful people are not immune from an immediate display of their own weakness and mortality. We can't contemplate life rightly unless somehow that factors into the way that we think, unless we somehow contemplate the fact that we are subject to divine call at any moment. Life can change quickly. Prosperity comes and goes. Beloved, here's what we should think about this: not only should that cause us to keep a short account of sin in our lives, not only should it make those of you that are still apart from Christ flee to him quickly, if a President can die in a moment, so can you. Flee to Christ while you can.

But beloved, here is the other thing that I would have you think about by way of application on this as well and this really shapes the way that we think about life and the way that we approach what happens to those around us. If this is true that you are mortal, if this is true that we're all mortal in this way, then this follows: when illness comes, it's no surprise; when death comes suddenly and unexpectedly, it's no surprise. It's not that we don't grieve over it; it's not that this makes us immune from the natural and appropriate human affections when people we love are threatened or lost through the frailty that is endemic to the human race. But beloved, and this is a great time for us to be thinking about this as a congregation because as far as I know, there's nothing immediate in the past just few weeks that is so fresh on our minds that we can't think about this with some measure of objectivity about it. When illness and death come, there should be a sense in which you say, "Oh, of course." As a Christian, you're not so totally shocked as if this was so completely unthinkable and unimaginable that I don't have room in my worldview to contemplate how this could happen to me. No, you come back to the things, these fundamental things that you know to be true and when that inevitably strikes in your life, we will be there to grieve with you, to weep with you, to go through the sorrow of that with you but have a margin in your mind that says, "Oh, but of course. Of course, this is the nature of man. Man is mortal. I never know exactly how that's going to play out in my life but when mortality comes, it doesn't surprise me because I have a biblical view of life that helps me understand where this comes from." That will guard you. That will help you. That will protect you from asking questions, "God, how could you do this?" You see, a good view of humanity, a good doctrine of man, protects you in times of grief and sorrow and tragedy and when it comes you say, "Oh, but of course." And rather than lifting an angry fist at God, "God, how could you let this break into my otherwise

wonderful life?" Instead, you're brought back to basics. You're brought back to the very basics of truth and you say, "Yeah, even my loved ones are subject to mortality. My life is not insulated from this expression of the consequences of the fall of the human race. I grieve over it but there's a part of me that is not surprised because I understand that death can come at any time because it is endemic, it is intrinsic to the nature of man in this life that we are mortal. We are like grass."

Now, I talk about these things a lot privately. Just yesterday I was saying something along these lines and someone asked me, "Would you please not talk about that? It's kind of depressing," and I get that and I realize that these are not comfortable things. We kind of like our lives. We don't like to think about it but, beloved, this can have such a sanctifying effect on your life if you're willing to think about this and really let it sink in, if you're willing to look back on past tragedies in your life and reinterpret them in light of the mortality of man. Because what this does is it humbles us. It takes away a false sense of security that life is always going to go on like it has before. It's not. That's a false sense of security. You say, "If that's it then what am I going to do if I don't think that way?" Do you know what you're going to do if you think that way is that as a Christian you're going to become more consciously dependent and humbled before the presence of the one who purchased you with his own blood. You approach life with the sense, "Lord, I can't clench onto this because I know that I'm mortal. God, I am just dependent upon you." Rather than resting and trusting in a false sense of security that life tomorrow will be like it was today, instead, this brings you to a point where you anchor your life in the character and faithfulness of the living God who saved you from sin and you say, "God, my hope isn't in tomorrow, my hope is in you."

When those loved ones are taken from our arms before we think it's time, we say with tears streaming down our face, "O but God, you made this plain all along. Of course, Father," and this is where it takes you, you say, "Father, not my will but thine be done. God, what else could I pray in response to this except for the fact that I received my life from you. You are the one who appoints our days and you have deemed this wise for this expression of mortality to break into my life now. God, this hurts. This surprises me. I didn't see this coming but, God, not my will but thine be done because I trust you and you told me in advance that we're all mortal, that we're all like grass, that it's all passing away. God, you didn't hide anything from me and so I quietly, reverently submit to this stroke of sorrow that you've seen fit to bring into my life because beforehand, God, you equipped me to realize the mortality of man and to realize that illness and death can come at any time."

You see, beloved, what this does speaking to you as a pastor now, almost everyone in this room comes faithfully to Truth Community and I love that about you. There are so many faces in here that I can count on being here week after week and I love that about you. I know that you love God's word. I know that you want to live for Christ and so just speaking in that pastoral role and seeking to the best of my ability the health of your soul in this moment, is for you to realize that when this factors into your thinking, this makes you love this world less and makes you love and anticipate the world to come with Christ all the more. You don't clench this world because you know it can be taken away. You've seen it in your own lives, I have too and rather than denying that and turning away as if that's just something that we can't contemplate, Scripture bids us to think about it, to contemplate the fact that man is like grass. The effect of that is not to discourage us or to depress us, it's to say, "O but thank God in heaven this isn't the life I'm living for primarily anyway. Thank God in heaven, I have a life yet to come. Thank Christ in heaven, that he's there preparing a place for me and one day will welcome me into that presence with the full image of God restored, where joy and heaven and peace are mine forever, never to be assaulted by this earthly mortality again."

You see, beloved, that's where a proper contemplation of the mortality of man as a Christian leads you. You say, "Then it can't be about this life. Ah, it's about that life yet to come that Christ has secured for me and no longer am I threatened by the horizontal mortality around me. I am secure. I am strengthened. I rejoice in the vertical eternity, the vertical permanence that will one day be mine." And when your heart is there, beloved, then your soul is going to prosper far more than in a sense of false security or a wondering of how did this mortality strike me? There are no exceptions. We're all subject to it and I like to be really practical on this point: if this is reality, then let's embrace it and then think and learn and grow in that which transcends this reality so it no longer threatens and frightens my soul. When you look for that reality, you look up and you see your Brother in heaven preparing, John 14, read it, "I go to prepare a place for you and

if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again.” And the love and the affections of your heart are not set on this mortality around us but on that which Christ has promised for those who love him. Beloved, I know, I know that if that's the love of your heart, you're going to prosper spiritually in this life and that's all I care about as your pastor. I want you to prosper spiritually in this life.

Now, who are you? You're a creature. You have dignity not shared by anything else in the universe and yet you're mortal, you're frail. We'll say some earthly goodbyes in the years ahead in Truth Community Church. Final point for you this morning is that you have responsibility. You have responsibility and I'm just going to spend a minute here. You have dignity as one created in the image of God. Here's what I want you to understand: God does not bestow that dignity lightly. We will give an account to him. Hebrews 9 says, “It is appointed for men,” those men created in the image of God, “it is appointed for them to die once and after this comes judgment.” God gave you life to live for his glory. If he has saved you, he has saved you all the more to live for his glory. If you're not yet in Christ, oh, oh, cry out to this one who alone can save sinners. He will receive you. Think about it this way: Christ did not lightly take on humanity. The fact that he took on the nature in which you share shows the fact that he is a willing Savior, willing to receive everyone of like nature to him who would come to him for eternal life. Beloved, be encouraged. You have dignity. Beloved, worship and give thanks for you're a creature. Beloved, take heed: you're mortal and you have responsibility but above all take hope in Christ, the one who became man to save men from their sins.

Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, we realize that we are not self-made people, we are creatures made in your image. It simultaneously humbles us and bestows dignity upon us. Father, we understand that your image has been defiled by sin and we've all sinned and fallen short of your glory. We'll talk about that another day for today, Father, we thank you for the special dignity that you bestowed upon the human race. We thank you that you gave us life, that you knit us in our mother's womb, you formed us according to your purpose and your plan. We're not an accident of evolution. We're not an accident of human interaction. All of this means that there is purpose and meaning and dignity to our lives.

Father, for those that are here today that perhaps have questioned that because sin has made such a wreck of their lives, Lord, I pray that you would have mercy and compassion and that this purpose that you had for humanity would be a beacon of light that would cause them to seek after Christ and to go after him and to flee to him and to cry out and say, “O Lord, save me from what my life has become. Save me that I might be what you created me to be.” Father, have that kind of mercy on such a one as this: confused and overwhelmed by life and not knowing where to turn. Father, may your Spirit make this a beacon of direction that causes them to rise and follow Christ.

Father, for those of us that know you, we thank you that you've not only bestowed upon us human dignity, you've actually given us your Holy Spirit, you've joined us together with Christ. We are the recipients of dignity and grace exponentially multiplied to infinite degree. You have shown so much to us. You have given so much to us. Then, Father, as an incidental aside, you've given us each other to share in this life together as a body of believers here at Truth Community. Father, we are greatly blessed. We are incalculably blessed and we are profoundly grateful. It was not by our works but by your grace that we find ourselves in this position. We give you thanks. We honor you. Yes, Father, we bow in worship before you. As creature to Creator, we worship you. As those redeemed to our Redeemer, we worship you and give you thanks. Father, let our lives approximate the grace and the dignity that you have bestowed in your wondrous, wise, perfect will and plan to appoint us for a life like this at a time like this. Father, as we contemplate these things, my prayer for each one here is that you would so work in our hearts that the things of this world would grow strangely dim in the light of your glory and your grace. We pray these things in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.