‘**What’s so special about human beings**?’

Questions for HG Leaders on Genesis 1vv26-31

**Getting going**

1. What are the similarities between animals and us human beings?
2. How do you react to the argument that in the same way we might put an animal out of its misery by ‘putting it to sleep’, so should we behave towards a human being?

**Into the text**

1. What does God want us to realise about the identity of all human beings in v26?
2. What does this phrase mean? Does it mean we look like God, think like God and can have a unique relationship with God? What are the ‘pros and cons’ of these suggestions?
3. What does God draw out as the true implication for us of being his ‘image-bearer’ in v26? Does the concept of a ‘Viceroy’ help you understand this role?
4. Is that how you saw yourself, and other human beings?
5. How should this privileged position make us respond to God, to the world in which we live, and to our fellow human beings? Be really practical!

**Thinking it through**

1. Does hearing about our privileged role make you feel pleased (because that’s how you’ve tried to live) or ashamed (because others, and often we, have been so often failures towards God, our world and others)?
2. Why do you think God decided to send Jesus ‘the perfect man’ into our world? What did he come to do, and what did he achieve?
3. What Is the current position of Jesus now, and what can we look forward to in the future (Hebrews 2vv6-9)

**Amazing grace….**

How about finishing you study by saying together Psalm 8- praising God for his grace in giving us this exalted position in the world, and – even when we failed to live up to it- sending his Son to able us to be *‘transformed into the likeness of Jesus with ever increasing glory* ‘ (2 Corinthians 3v18), a transformation that will one day be complete…

Praise God!

**‘What’s so special about human beings?’**

**Genesis 1vv26-31**

I wonder if you have ever played the game ‘Spot the difference!’

I’d like us to play that game with these 2 images – (put images of chimpanzee and baby on screens, please)

Well, you’ll get no prizes for saying that one is a chimpanzee, the other a baby – that’s a pretty obvious thing to notice!

But there has been a trend recently amongst some scientists and philosophers to **minimise** the differences between animals and human beings, since humans share about 96% of the DNA with chimps. ‘*Aren’t we all just animals*?’ some people would argue, and ‘*the life of a human is worth no more than that of an animal*…’

Well, our Bible passage this morning helps us to ‘spot’ the essential difference between animals and humans, and helps us to grasp the dignity, worth and role of each of us humans, whether we’re a baby like Lily, or an adult.

Turn then with me to p1 of your Bibles, and let’s see what God wants us to know about ourselves..

First, we see that We are special!

 Last week, we saw how God made the whole world, and rules over it with complete authority. But in v26, we hear God making a huge decision. The summit of his creation was **NOT** the skies, the seas, the mountain ranges, the dolphins, the lions.

Rather, the summit is us human beings, after which God says that all he has made was **very good.**

Listen to what God says about us

‘Let us make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness…’

**That** then is the **real** difference then between the cutest animal and us. We – and not they - have been made in the ‘image of God’.

But what does this **mean**, you might well ask…

Does it mean that we look like God, just like we might look like our parents and our children (poor things) might look like us!

The famous artist Michelangelo seems to think this in his painting on the ceiling of the Sistene Chapel in Rome. Here’s how he imagines the scene at creation (image of God pointing at man), with the first man resembling God in appearance.

Well, I’m not sure that can be right, for the God of the Bible is a very complex being- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It’s hard to imagine how human beings can resemble in any physical sense a God like that!

Others have argued that we bear God’s image in that we display something of his character, for example, his intelligence. They point to brain boxes like this man (Image of Albert Einstein) and say that their brain power reflects something of God’s wisdom. Well, we can see what they mean, but we’d have to say that there’s an ocean of difference between the wisdom, power and righteousness of God and any intellectual, president or Archbishop!

 Others have argued that being made in God’s image means that we have a unique capacity to know him and communicate with him through prayer (Image of a person praying) . That’s certainly true, for you don’t see chimps at a prayer meeting, or dogs at a séance! They don’t have that sense of something beyond them, their Maker, who they can and need to relate to.

All of these ideas have some pluses and minuses, but – interestingly - the one developed in Genesis is that of **rule.** Listen again to v26. God says that humans are made in his image ‘**so that** they may ‘rule the world….**’** – the fish, the birds, the livestock, the wild animals, indeed over all the creatures, and subdue the earth (v28)

We are to exercise this rule ‘on God’s behalf’

Maybe this person (Image of Mountbatten) Lord Mountbatten may help us understand this role God has for us….

In 1947, he was appointed by King George 6th to be the Viceroy of India. This was necessary so that the King could exercise his rule over India from a man on the ground, rather than from his office in Buckingham Palace!

In a similar sense, God appoints the human race – his image bearers- to be his viceroys over the earth. We are (to see ourselves then as) God’s viceroys over His world

*This will involve us*

‘Filling it’ - as we marry and have children; and as we give ourselves to ‘Subduing, and ruling over it’

Well, let’s pause there and have a brief ‘time out’! What should this insight of ourselves as God’s image bearers mean for us?

Well surely, it should make us want **to praise God** (Person praising God) from the bottom of our hearts. Just think how pleased we were to be selected for that sports team as kids, that college place, that position in the firm. How pleased we were to be chosen to be someone’s marriage partner. Well God has **chosen** US to bear his image in the world, to be in the deepest of **relationships** with him, and then to **rule for him**. That should inspire us to praise him constantly…

It should also stimulate us to **obey** him (‘Yes Lord’)**.** We are not Presidents or Prime Ministers with responsibilities over whole nations, and influences in the world. BUT we DO have areas of influence, in our families, at work, in our communities, and as we pray for the spread of God’s kingdom throughout the world. Will we obey God, and be faithful image bearers for him?

It should also profoundly affect the way we see other people (Image of a pair of spectacles.) Each other person in the world – is a fellow image bearer of God with us, and so deserving our‘respect and care’.

That speaks to us, surely, for we can so easily give only the successful our respect, whereas everyone – from the Company chairman to the newest intern deserves our **respect**.

And we should care for everyone – a care that extends from the embryo at one end of life to the most needy senior at the other, and to everyone in between….

**Gratitude, obedience and respect** all flow, it seems to me, from God’s creation of all humanity – male and female- as his image bearers. What a gracious God we have to give us this privileged position….

 That’s the **main** thing I want to bring to you this morning from the passage. But before we finish, there are just 2 other-shorter- reactions we should have as we set this truth in the context of all 66 books of the Bible…

1. We can feel uneasy…..

Many of us will have heard this man **(**Image of Mark Twain) the American author Mark Twain.

He once said of humanity – ‘‘Man is the only animals that blushes. Or needs to…’

He said this because he was aware of the **gap,** indeed the **chasm,** that exists between mankind as we were created, and the reality we see in the papers, walking along the streets, or even as we look at ourselves in the mirror!

Have a look at the simple little diagram on the screens (image of Crown, stick man and globe)

This pictures what Genesis 1 teaches, namely what God made humans to be.

We were to place ourselves **under** God’s crown, dependent on and obedient to Him, but over the world. God’s viceroys…

But as we look at the world today, that’s **not** how we see people behave!

It’s more like this (Image of Crown crossed out and globe, with stickman and own little crown)

Humanity has **refused** to give to God the **central** place He deserves in our lives. We’ve put a red cross through His Crown, and put tawdry little crowns on our own heads, and lived as we like, failing to look after God’s creation and care for our fellow human beings as we should…

That’s why the very good world God created is often in such a mess today…

If we’re thoughtful people, as I’m sure we are, we will often want to bury our heads in shame (Image of person hanging head) as we think about what a dog’s breakfast humanity has made of our privileged position! We’ll also want to acknowledge that this picture has all too often described not just others, but **us too**.

~That’s true, but it’s **not** where I should end if I want to be faithful to the picture that emerges from the **whole** of the Bible. For Christians are to be people of **deep joy**, for We rejoice in the perfect man, Jesus Christ.

God’s plan to be represented and rule through humanity was often frustrated by our many failures to honour God, care for the world and respect our fellow human beings….

That was sad, but it was **not** the end of God’s plans for the world.

He resolved to send his Son Jesus Christ, as the perfect man (Image of Crown, world and picture of Jesus) into our world.

Through his teaching, his miracles, his care, he would perfectly model God to people

Through his death (Image of Jesus on Cross) and resurrection he would offer forgiveness of sins, and the sure hope of eternal life in glory

As Christians then, we can rejoice now that Jesus came ….

* to reconcile us to God,
* to change us into his likeness,
* to (start to) enable us to become what God wanted us to be..

That’s what he’s doing for us **now**, if we have turned from our sins and put our trust in Jesus…

And what a **future** we have to look forward to, if we’re Christians. As we gaze into our spiritual telescopes (image of a telescope), we look forward one day, when he returns in glory at the end of time, to being perfectly (words on screen **‘**Like Jesus’and‘Reigning with Jesus’).

One day, we will perfectly enjoy all that God created humanity for. Until that day arises, we remain people of **gratitude, humility and hope**

Let’s stop there, and let me give you a moment or two for personal reflection

(All saw Psalm 8 together)

(Next song….)