

Who Am I?

September 23-24, 2000

Rich Nathan

Roots: A Study of the Genesis 1-11

Genesis 1:26-31

There was a philosopher in Germany named Arther Shopenhauer. He was a gloomy, melancholic kind of guy, who, like a lot of philosophers, would wander down the street with chalk dust on his suit, totally absorbed with some philosophical problem. One day Shopenhauer was walking down the street oblivious to the world around him when he bumped into another man. This man very angrily shoved Arther Shopenhauer and screamed at him saying, “Who do you think you are?”

Shopenhauer took that to be a philosophical question. He stopped and stared at the man and said, “Who do I think I am? I only wish I knew. I wish I knew who I was.” He wandered off down the street and was plunged into this major depression as he wrestled with this guy’s question: “Who do you think you are?”

Now, very few of us are as obsessive and as focused as someone like Arther Shopenhaur. And yet the question is there hanging in the air for every one of us—who am I? Who do you think you are? It is one of the most fundamental questions that you can ask and answer. Who are you really?

Last week I began a series from the book of Genesis, a series that I am calling “Roots.” I explained to you last week that it is only as we know where we come from, what our origin

is, can we make sense of life in the world. Again, most of us aren't philosophers, but we all struggle with the issue of personal identity.

Who am I? This is the theme of lots of movies. You have seen movies that roll out this way. The opening scene shows a harried housewife carrying a huge basket of laundry up the stairs. She has her hair matted to her head, sweating, blowing hair out of her face. As she gets up the stairs, she sees that her big sheep-dog has knocked down one of her plants, and so all of the dirt is all over her floor. In the kitchen her toddler has gotten into all the pots and pans. He has the pot sitting on his head. He is banging the top of the pot on the tile floor and he has taken Comet cleanser and spread it around. There is this absolutely crazy, out-of-control, housewife making lunches in the morning, answering the phone, chauffeuring kids to soccer games, and she hits this crisis.

“Who am I? I don't have a moment for reflection regarding what I am here for, what my life is about.”

And then the movie unfolds and she tries to find herself through an affair or through leaving for a period of time.

Identity questions. I have ministered to lots of people who seem hollow inside in answer to the question: Who am I? It almost seems that the person will say, “Well, who do you want me to be?” Have you not met many men and women who seem to you to just be empty boxes? You talk with them and you can watch them trying to read you and assess on reading you, based on your frowns, smiles or body language, or nods of approval or looks of

disapproval, they will shift gears in the middle of the conversation. It seems like they were saying one thing and had one opinion, but as they watch you, they shifted and just reflected back to you who you are.

Have you not met many men and women, maybe a few of you suffer from this syndrome? They are persons who have very few convictions. It is the person who seems like there is not a stake driven in the ground where from the inside they say, “This is who I am and this is what I believe. No matter what the rest of the world says, no matter what your face shows me – whether approval or disapproval – this is what I believe.” How few are the men and women who stand for something, who believe something.

I was interviewed by a guy a few years ago who was working on his doctorate in ministry. He was going around to pastors of larger churches. He was asking the question: “Why is your church growing? What is the secret?” After I told him I didn’t there was a particular secret, I said that you can’t put God in a bottle. You can’t come up with a formula for growth.

He said, “Yeah, yeah – I know all of that. But now I am going to put a gun to your head and say, if you look at other churches who also have the Lord and who also pray and who also believe the same Bible as you do and who also have God with them, do you see anything that may be lacking in the life of pastors or leaders?”

I said, “Well, I do think there is one thing lacking. A lot of pastors and leaders don’t know who they are. And so they are always trying to be what they are not. I personally find most

people to be delightful when they are just them – in all their quirkiness, in all their weirdness, with all their mannerisms and hand motions and accents and senses of humor and vocal patterns. When people are just who they are, I find most people to be really delightful.”

But unfortunately, pastors in particular, have been trained to not just be real people. Somewhere along the line, they got the message that being who they were was not good enough. That God couldn’t just use them the way they were. And so they got this other identity over the top of them. This persona that is really ugly and off-putting. And they are constantly trying to move in areas of gifting where they aren’t particularly gifted. And they are constantly trying to imitate the vocal patterns, hand motions, or ministries of someone else.

If only they knew who they were— lots of people, lots of pastors, seem to have no center, no core identity. No place where a stake is driven in them. This is me.

And all over America we find the most superficial basis for answering the question: “Who am I?” I think of a woman named Cindy Jackson who has been in the news on several occasions. She has spent ten years and several hundred thousand dollars to remake her body through plastic surgery so that she looks like a Barbie Doll.

Who am I? Cindy Jackson would answer, “I don’t know, but I know who I want to be. I want to be Barbie.”

She said she had a whole plan in mind when she underwent the first cosmetic surgery procedure at the age of 33. She had her eyes widened and lifted, as well as knee and abdomen liposuction. She had liposuction done on her knees. For the record, she has jaw line liposuction, four face lifts, two nose jobs, outer thigh liposuction, silicone breast implants, two chemical face peels, fat transfer and dermabrasion, facial dermabrasion, liposuction on her inner thighs and hips, cosmetic dentistry twice, a chin reduction, a hair transplant and make-up tattooed on her eyebrows, eyeliner and lipstick.

She said she is almost complete. She is just tweaking now. This spring she plans to have a hollow tube of Teflon inserted in her lower lip to make it more prominent. And she says, “Life is more wonderful than I have ever dreamed it to be.” She has a place in London. She just bought a new Mercedes. She wears fabulous clothes and dates really wealthy guys. She is now going out with the former boyfriend of Princess Di – James Hewitt. She even has a cat that she says she paid \$15,000 for – all because she looks like Barbie.

Not only does it say something about Cindy Jackson, it says something about the world. She never could have gotten all of this stuff unless she looked like Barbie.

Last year more than 25,000 teenagers got elective plastic surgery in the United States. 25,000 teens said they really didn’t like the way they looked, so they got cosmetic surgery. There were over two million cosmetic surgery operations last year, many of them for increasingly young women and men. Plastic surgeons are reporting that women in their early 30’s are getting face lifts. It used to be an operation reserved for those in their 60’s. Folks are lining up to get liposuction.

We have the most superficial basis for forming identity. The clothes we wear as we identify with a particular brand of merchandise. Polo or Ralph Lauren or Abercrombie and Fitch or Tommy Hilfiger. I see on TV every time Brittany Spears appears, tickets go on sale. Moms are dragging their 9-year olds to the concerts and all these little girls are wearing midriff baring, halter tops so that they can be like Brittany Spears. I read a statement by a 10-year old recently who said that she was concerned about her waistline. A 10-year old girl. She said she was concerned about her waistline because when she got older she wanted to look like Brittany Spears and wear a bikini.

When we have nothing inside we start searching around for some kind of identity. Who am I?

Slide #1: Well, look at this guy who dresses up before a Cleveland Browns game. He sits in the Dog pound. He is an orthopedic surgeon.

Slide #2: Or how about these guys with dog bones on their heads.

Slide #3: Or how about these Green Bay Packers fans who paint themselves.

Slide #4: And then there are the Cheese Heads at the Green Bay Packers games. Here is a worthwhile fan club.

You think about all of the people whose lives are absorbed in sports. “Well, I can’t go to church. There is a football game on that I have to see.” “There is a golf match I have to watch.”

Beyond all the sports fanatics whose lives really gain meaning from the rise and fall of their teams, there are all these fan clubs and collector clubs.

Slide #5: Check this fellow out. He is part of the Beer Can Collectors of America Club. They meet each year down in Mobile, Alabama to show off their beer cans. Again, a very, very worthwhile pursuit.

Slide #6: Of course, all there is all the advertising. The advertisers know that people have no root in themselves, no real answers to the question: Who am I? So they sell you an image. Look at this Estee Lauder perfume ad: Beautiful. If you just put a couple of that on behind your ears, you, too, could run along the beach in your wedding gown being chased by a fabulously dressed wedding party. No more sweat clothes for you.

Slide #7: Then here is another very typical ad. Here is a woman who may be in her late 40’s, but because she wears Dockers, she has instantly lost 35-40 years. There she is just leaning against the wall in her Dockers eating a lollipop the way she did when she was 12.

Slides #8 and 9: Just one more. Here I think is the ultimate fan club. The person who is really searching for identity can join the “Erik Estrada Fan Club” and get together with other people who believe that CHIPS was the best show ever produced on TV.

Who am I? Who are we?

Do you know the two most popular scientific perspectives are that we are simply highly advanced animals? The socio-biologists are constantly doing experiments with rats, mosquitoes, or fruit flies to try to explain human behavior by the behavior of a mosquito or a fruit fly or a rat. You are just an advanced animal. Just a mammal who happens to walk upright and who has an opposable thumb.

Or you are just a living computer. Who am I? I am just a sophisticated computer. There are scientists hard at work right now attempting to establish dialogues between nerve cells and silicon chips. Looking forward to the day when we can put computer chips directly into the brain so that we can unite mind and machine.

There are very few questions more important than the question: Who am I? Who are we? Today we are going to find the biblical answer to that question. We are made in the image of God. Let's pray.

If you have a Bible, please open to Genesis 1:26-31

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.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and of all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I will give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Who am I? We are made in God’s image. If that is the case, then we need to know whose image we are made in. Who is God? You can’t answer the question who you are, unless you know who is God, in whose image you are made. The reason why there is this incredible search for identity and people are traveling around the country in campers still following The Grateful Dead or Fish or painting themselves brown and orange and wearing dog masks with dog bones on their heads – the reason why folks are such suckers for every advertiser who wants to sell you an identity is because we don’t know God.

And if we don’t know God, we don’t know whose image we are supposed to reflect. You will never be able to find yourself without first finding God. The search in the movies, about the housewife who is looking for herself, is never going to be answered in the arms of another lover, in an adulterous affair, in making good in the business world. And your search for who you are is never going to be found outside the home as you also get to climb the corporate ladder and make executive decisions.

Women, men, the starting point for answering the question: Who am I? is answering another question: Who is God? It is by trying to find God, searching for God, getting to know God, that we begin to get to know ourselves.

Well, who is God? We have this most peculiar verse in v. 26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” We have God speaking in the plural. Let us make mankind in our image. Why the plural “us” and “our” instead of the singular “me” and “my?” Why doesn’t God say, “Let me make mankind in my image, after my likeness?” Even the name for God is a plural name. It is the Hebrew word “Elohim.” This business of God being plural is compounded by the name of God – Elohim.

The Jews who were translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek back in the 3rd century B.C., 2300 years ago, were so troubled by this that they retranslated this phrase to read, “Let me make me man in my image, after my likeness.” They didn’t like this idea of God in some way being plural.

Well, what does it mean that God speaks about himself using plural language? Some Old Testament scholars see in this a vestige of an older polytheistic creation myth that somehow worked its way into the text. They say, “Well, the author of Genesis was borrowing from some ancient Near Eastern myth where the gods created and overlooked the fact that there these polytheistic references and it worked its way into the text.

This view is hardly worth considering. If there is anything that is plain about the Old Testament from beginning to end, it is its unanimous rejection of ancient polytheism in its very aggressive assertion over and over again that God is one. The words of Genesis 1 were chosen very deliberately. This passage has a very deliberate structure to it. The author didn’t overlook anything. It is not a vestige of ancient polytheism.

Some folks say that God is speaking to his heavenly court. He is talking to the rest of the angels, his entourage, and he is saying, “Let us...God and the angels make man in our image, after our likeness.” Some of your study bibles will even use this view of God and the angels as the explanation in your study notes. But I think it is completely erroneous. Nowhere in the Old Testament or New Testament do we read of angels creating mankind or people being made in the image or likeness of angels. God is always the sole creator. We are made in God’s image. Not in the image of angels.

Why the plural use of “us” and “our” in reference to God? Some say God was speaking with the plural of majesty – the way that the Queen of England would refer to herself today when she says things like “We are pleased with the performance of our troops.” “We are delighted to inaugurate the launching of our new aircraft carrier.” Or even “We like these Hostess Ho-Ho’s and we would enjoy consuming another box full.” Some people say, “Well, all that is being communicated by these plural pronouns is the royal “We” – the “We” of majesty.

The problem is that while the royal “We” is something that occurs in modern English, it does not occur in ancient Hebrew. It is an anachronism. It is like saying, “I’ll bet Jesus and the disciples when they sat around the fire at night and talked guy talk, they probably talked about the Buckeyes, just the way I would.” Yeah, on those cool autumn nights around the campfire I can imagine them chatting about the Buckeyes running game and second guessing the coaches’ strategies. Jesus and the disciples talked about a lot of things around campfires at night, but I guarantee you Buckeye football wasn’t one of the things they talked about.

And there are a number of possibilities regarding what could be meant by “Let us make mankind in our image, and after our likeness,” but I guarantee you the modern English royal “We,” the “We” of Queen Elizabeth, was not one of the things that the writer of Genesis was referring to.

The most likely explanation for these plural words is that in God there is a plurality. There is plurality of persons in the Godhead. The early Christians universally believed that the use of the plural was an early hint of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. There is a plurality of persons in God. When I want to answer the question “Who is God?” I have to say that God is one, but he is not an undifferentiated one. There is some plurality in God. There is more than one person in the Godhead.

And the context suggests unity and plurality. When you go down to v. 27, “So God created mankind – a unity – in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.” A unity – mankind. Differentiation of persons – male and female.

You say, “Rich, do we see this differentiation of persons anywhere else in the Old Testament or is this just a Christian doctrine read backwards into the Old Testament? Jewish scholars would reject this idea of differentiation of persons. You know, Jews don’t believe in a Trinity. Do we see hints of the Trinity even back in the Old Testament? Or is this just a Christian rereading from the vantage point of the New Testament?”

Well, I would suggest to you that there are many texts that hint of a plurality of persons where one person is called God, or the Lord, and it is distinguished from another person who is also called God. One of the most famous, of course, if you are taking notes, is Psalm 110:1 where King David says, “The Lord, Yahweh, says to my Lord, ‘Adonai, sit at my right hand.’” David’s Lord is speaking to another person, who he also calls his “Lord” and says to that other person, “Sit at my right hand.”

Or Psalm 45:6-7, “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. [He is talking to God and he says to God] You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions.”

Here are two persons named God. One person named God has a throne that will last forever and ever, and yet he has submitted to another person named God. We see a plurality in the Godhead.

In trying to figure out who we are, we need to understand first who God is. And who God is, is a plurality of persons. We Christians understand that as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I can’t understand my nature unless I understand his nature. He is a plurality of persons.

Another way to put it is he is a community of love. He is not just a solitary being who is love, he is a community of love – a Father loving the Son; the Son loving the Father; the Holy Spirit binding together Father and Son. He is a community of Love. And we will find

in just a moment that I could never find myself and who I am outside of being in relationship, being in a community of love.

Who am I? Who are you? We are human beings made in the image of God. The most fundamental thing you can say about yourself is not your perfume or what logo you have on your shirt or your socks or the job you hold or your degrees or what you've had tattooed on your body or whether you have a bone on your head because you are a Browns fan. The most fundamental thing you can say about any human being is that you are someone who is made in the image of God.

V. 26, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" V. 27, "So God created mankind (not just man, the male, but mankind) in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Just like "let us make man" plurality in God, the image of God is variously understood throughout the history of the church. Certainly, there is a part of the meaning of being made in the image of God that we share some of the qualities of our Creator. That our personality reflects the fact that our Creator is not an impersonal force like the Star Wars Force. The fact that you are a person is a reflection of the truth that you were created by a personal being, in fact, a tri-personal being.

Your personhood came from his personhood. Your ability to make moral choices reflects the fact that our God is moral. We not only find out who we are by looking at God, but to some degree, we find out who God is by looking at ourselves.

Now, we don't reflect God's image perfectly. We often are more like a fun-house mirror where you see certain qualities, but they are distorted. We are going to learn about why they are distorted as a result of the Fall. But you can learn some things about a person by looking at a fun-house mirror.

We have a moral capacity to make choices toward doing right or doing wrong. This reflects the perfect moral reasoning of our God.

We have a capacity for holiness, a capacity for relationship. We create and in creating we reflect the image of God, who is a Creator. So when you paint, when you write an essay, when you write a poem, when you come up with your own recipe for something, when you sew a skirt or make curtains, or build a bookcase, you are reflecting God's image. Now, if you are like me as a builder, you are reflecting God's image poorly when you build. But there is something there, however lost under the layers of tarnish.

Who am I? Who are you? I think of the wife in tears pouring out her story about her unhappy marriage to a non-communicative slob. The most she can illicit from him in communication is a grunt as he is buried behind the sports section of the newspaper or buried in his Sports Illustrated. Her husband has no table manners. He wears the same dirty catsup stained t-shirt all the time, belches after he eats without saying "excuse me." There are dirty clothes on the floor. He is a pig. She says it over and over again, "My husband is just a grunting pig."

What do you say? Divorce him? Leave him? Or just accept the fact that you are married to a poorly dressed, inarticulate, grunting pig? Or how about taking this tact: Wife, husband, roommate, how about taking this tact: the question boils down to whom are you married to? What is your husband? What are you? What is your roommate? Your co-worker? Your sister? Your mother? Your child? Who are you? Who are they?

Let's go back to the beginning. Wife, did you always feel this way? When you were dating did you say, "You know, I want to spend the next 50 years with someone I perceive to a poorly dressed, inarticulate, grunting pig. I just want to come home to a total slob and torture myself for the next five decades." Is that what you said?

Of course not. Wife, what did you like about him in the beginning? Did you ever love him?

Well, I thought I did.

Well, why?

Well, he was a great listener. When we went out on dates he was a real gentleman. He used to hold the door and my chair for me. He had a great sense of humor. He was sensitive. But I guess I was deceived. I guess he was none of those things. I guess he was a big pig underneath.

Were you deceived? Was the person you met just a big show, a sham? It is possible your husband was a total deceiver, but he doesn't strike me as the type to put together such an

elaborate conspiracy. He seems simpler than that. See, the most important question is, which person really is your husband? Is your husband a sensitive gentleman that you married or the obnoxious slob that you live with?

And who are you? Are you the person you are in your worst moments – angry, judgmental, out of control, miserable, making everyone else around you miserable? Who are you? Are you the person you are in your worst moments or are you the person you are when you are at your best? When you are relating to God? When you are quick to admit faults? When you are able to laugh at yourself and you are not hyper-sensitive and defensive? You are humble. When you are thankful and grateful for all of God's little blessings.

Who are you? Are you the person you are in your worst moments or are you the person who is sometimes full of worship? Full of encouragement toward others? Full of gratitude and joy about your life?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor during the Nazi period in Germany during WWII. He was imprisoned for conspiring to overthrow Hitler. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a poem asking this question: "Who am I - who is this two-sided thing that we see in ourselves and in our mates and roommates and we see in our bosses?"

Who Am I?

Who am I? they often tell me

I would step from my cell's confinement

Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,

Like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me

I would talk to my warders

Freely and friendly and clearly,

As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me

I would bear the days of misfortune

Equably, smilingly, proudly,

Like one accustomed to win.

Am I really all that which other men tell of?

Or am I only what I know of myself,

Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,

Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my

Throat,

Yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,

Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,

Trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,

Tossing in expectation of great events,

Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,

Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,

Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?

Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?

Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,

And before myself a contemptibly noebegone weakling?

Or is something within me still like a beaten army,

Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

Who am I? I see this split thing in me and I see in everyone else. But one part is underneath the other. The image of God is reflected when you are at your optimum. The Fall is a deviation, a turning away of what you essentially are. It is a distortion of your nature, not your real nature. It is a distortion. You, at your worst moments, are a distortion of what you are.

So here is what we would be saying to the wife in tears and to you who are depressed about yourself and to you who are upset with a roommate and to you who want to care for or minister to someone who is homeless or living under a bridge: pray for the eyes of Jesus. The thing that we see in our Lord Jesus throughout the gospels is his incredible capacity to see the image of God where we would only see the crud and the crust. Pray for the eyes of Jesus over and over again. What we see in our Lord is his capacity to see underneath the

crust and the crud, underneath the sin of the prostitutes and tax collectors. He said, “There is the image of God.” He saw the original portrait under all the marring and distortion.

That was Mother Theresa’s great gift to the 20th century world. She was one person who could see underneath the scabs and the sores and the filth of those who were dying in the streets of Calcutta. Underneath the leper’s skin, she had eyes to see the image of God and said, “There is a man underneath that. There is a woman.”

This is what Jesus Christ does for us. When he comes into our lives and we are living in relationship with him, not only does he give us a more sensitive conscience, not only does he give us a new will so that we no longer have to sin, not only does he provide for a person new direction, a new plan and purpose, but as we live in relationship to him, he gives you new eyes. I am not talking about some naïve, “This person is not so bad – his habits are really kind of charming” – I am not talking about some liberal deal where people shouldn’t be held accountable for what they do, they aren’t responsible, they are just poor victims. They aren’t accountable before God as sinners.

I am saying that even in the prisoner, even in the homeless person, even in the vulgar sports hero or the woman who has had 20 operations to become Barbie, even in the drug addict, the terrible supervisor, there is the image of God, if you have eyes to see it. There is someone who was made to be a friend of God, if you have eyes to see it. There is a man or woman who was made to love and be loved, who was made to be a blessing to others, if you have eyes to see it.

“Lord,” you pray, “give me your eyes towards my child because all I see is a mess.”

“Give me your eyes toward my co-worker because all I do is struggle with judgment or envy.”

“Give me your eyes, Lord, toward my mate, toward my roommate, I can hardly think of anything nice about them.”

Who is your spouse? Your mother? The person you struggle with? They are a woman or man made in God’s image, if you have eyes to see.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Well, if you look at the ancient Near Eastern world, the word “image” generally referred to a three-dimensional statue that represented the presence of the king when he wasn’t physically present in a location. A king would conquer a bunch of cities. He lived in another place. And in those cities, he would erect statues to himself that were called the image of the king. And the image of the king was meant to represent his presence in that conquered city.

This gives us insight into what it means to be made in the image of God. Certainly, it means to reflect some of God’s qualities. But to be made in the image of God also means to represent God’s presence when he is not physically present.

How is God present in the world? He is not the rocks. He is not the trees. He is the maker of the rocks and the trees. But he is separated from his creation. How is God present in the creation? God is present in his Word. God’s presence is brought into the world through

his church. God's presence is brought into the world by his Spirit. God's presence is brought into this world by his representatives.

The creatures on earth that were given the task to represent God, by bringing his presence into life situations, are human beings. Dogs were not asked to fulfill the task of bringing God's presence into the world. However much you love your dog, their assigned role was not to bring God's presence into the world. Neither was your cat assigned to bring God's presence into the world, nor your goldfish, or amoeba or whales, or dolphins – not even Flipper.

It was given to human beings to bring the presence of God into the world. To represent the king. And how are we to represent the king? The Bible tells us by representing his rulership everywhere we go. V. 26, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind 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.'"

How are we called to represent God in the world? By bringing his rulership in the world. V. 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. I will give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.'"

Perhaps in man's original state, he was a vegetarian. I don't know. But God is represented as we exercise dominion, rulership over the world.

Now, sadly, this understanding of mankind's rulership or dominion over the animals and the earth has been tragically misunderstood. People read this text as if the rest of creation exists for mankind's benefit and exploitation period. They say, "Well, God gave us rulership and dominion, so it must be OK to God if we pollute the air and drive 7000-pound gas guzzlers, to consume as much as you can afford."

"Hey, I am paying for it. I work for it. So I should be able to live in as big a place as possible and consume as much as possible and drive the biggest thing as possible and throw away as much gas as possible."

And it must be OK for us to do anything we want to animals. Even if it is as stupid as testing some new deodorant by spraying it in their eyes. We are given dominion.

Some people think that Genesis 1 means that we people own and run the world. The only question is what is most efficient, what is most productive, what will gain the most for us? But that is not what the text is teaching. There are some limits on dominion and rulership. We are not the only beings created by God. The whole chapter tells us that everything came from the hand of God – the air, the sea, the animals, the plant life, the fish – he made it all. And most importantly, he made it all not for us to exploit – to use the world as raw material for our ambitions, our profit and our lust. He gave us dominion so that as his image bearers we could represent his rule, not our rule, but his rule.

What is God's rule like that we human beings, all of us, not just Christians, but all human beings, as image bearers, are called to represent? Is God's rule an exploitive rule? A grubbing, use-it-up, get the most that you can, grabbing and toss aside portions of the world for short-term gain? What is God's rule like? Because his rule, the quality of his rule, is what you are called to represent. What does it look like when God's rule comes?

When God's rule comes, it comes by way of serving others. When God's rule comes, it comes by way of blessing others. When God's rule comes, it comes to bring peace and order and healing to others. Our king is a servant king. Our king is the one who pours his life out for others. Our king is the one who cares for others and loves others. And we are called to represent our king and bring his presence.

So here's the bottom line, friends – it has implications for environmental policy, dominion over the earth is not exercised by some agri-business that lets run-off from its chicken farm seep into the ground water of the surrounding community. Dominion over the earth is not exercised when the Army buries a chemical dump underneath a high school and covers it up for 30 years. Dominion over the earth is not exercised by a company that is constantly dodging environmental regulations to make a quick buck.

Dominion is exercised by engineers who try to figure out how we can NOT pollute the earth. How we can use the sun and the wind to make energy. Dominion is exercised by a homeowner who says, "I am not just going to dump paint or paint thinner or gasoline down the sewer. I am going to dispose of it properly." Dominion is exercised properly by a car

buyer who chooses to scale back on the size of the car, instead of buying the biggest baddest car that you can possibly afford.

Let me make this really plain. One of the saddest features of contemporary life in the 21st century is that environmentalists, those who are talking about the environment and talking about treatment of animals, are almost always entirely New Agers, who are working from a totally non-biblical base. Who are these extremists who are arguing that we are engaged in specism when we test lifesaving drugs on rats? One of the saddest features of contemporary life in the 21st century is that almost all the arguments for the environment and almost all the calls for responsible treatment of the earth and the land and the water and other living creatures are not coming from Christians.

The early church Fathers used to say that heresy always springs from a weakness in the church. That you always get false teaching, extreme teaching, when the church has neglected an emphasis or misses a certain truth. And a proper understanding of servant leadership of this earth has led to all the environmentalist extremists. Christian friends, rather than mocking the tree huggers and environmental activists, I think the more important question is: Where are the Christian environmentalists? Where is the church coming up with a position on loving stewardship of the earth, air or water? Where are the Christians whenever there is an environmental debate? Why are the Christians always on the side of exploitation? Why is it more likely that a Christian would be suspicious of efforts to clean up the air or water than they would be suspicious of companies that want to dump?

I believe it is the church's weakness, our failure to understand what it means to represent the kind, loving, gentle stewardship and rule of God that has led to all the extremists. We Christians have exploited the earth.

Last thing – what does it mean to be made in the image of God? It means to reflect certain qualities, to have a moral nature, to make choices to freely choose against sin. It means to reflect God's servant rule in leadership.

But ultimately, I believe from the context that it means to be made for relationship. The image of God is not just an individual concept as if the image is just possessed by one solitary person. It is us in relationship with each other that models God's image. That's why I spent so much time earlier talking about who is God? God, we saw was a plurality of persons. A single being who speaks about himself in plural terms, "Let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness." God, you could say, is a community within himself of love – Father loving Son; Son loving Father; the Holy Spirit binding the Father and Son together.

Who are we? What does it mean to be made in God's image? We are meant to be a community of love. In the image of God, he created him male and female, he created them. Just as God is a unity of differentiated persons, so humankind is meant to be a unity of differentiated persons. Just as God is a community of love, we show forth God's image when we function in a community of love. To be fully human is to be in relationship.

In my introduction I said one of the common themes in movies today is "how do I find myself?" The homemaker who is struggling and saying, "How do I find myself?" The

teenager who is looking for his identity. The businessman who is asking the question, “How do I develop my greatest potential as a human being?”

How do you find happiness? How do you find fulfillment? It is tied in with answering this question: Who am I? You find fulfillment as you discover what it means to be made in the image of God. Because to the extent you live consistently with God’s design as one made in his image, you will be fulfilled.

Now, here’s the deal. To the extent you live in relationship, giving your life away to others, you find happiness and fulfillment. See, the general approach to fulfillment in the modern world is to say the more that my needs are met, the more that I work on myself, sculpt myself, keep molding myself – I imagine that I am just this gigantic sculpture and I will constantly be working on myself – going to the gym, tightening my tummy, getting liposuction, getting face lifts, taking Chinese cooking classes – the more I work on myself, the more I maximize my potential, the more of my humanity I express as I can maximize my pleasure in this world, as I make the most money, that’s how I find myself.

Let me give you a little illustration and then I am going to close. Imagine two different men. One man lives for his family. He wants to create a home that is a blessing to his wife and children. He pours himself out to guide his family, to make sure that Christ is at the center. He is really there for his wife. And he is really there for his kids, talking with them, encouraging them and exhorting them and urging them on. He is available for counsel. He is an encourager, this guy, of people who are dropping out of the church. When you watch the guy, he always has his arm around someone. He is going after people who wander away.

He is like a pit bull, he is sharing his faith. The guy rarely thinks about his own fulfillment. He hardly ever asks the question, what will make me happy? The focus of his entire life is, “How can I do the most good to the most people and how can I glorify God while I live in this body?”

There’s another guy. He goes after fulfillment directly. Every morning he wakes up and says, “How can I grab the most out of life today? How can I make the shrewdest career enhancing move today? How can I enhance my position in the office? How can I experience more thrills today? How can I improve my cash position and my financial portfolio today? What can I do today to make a mark on the world, to gain influence, prestige and power?”

He thinks in the back of his mind, “One day, when I have it all, the great house bordering the 17th green of the country club golf course, the country club membership, the pretty young trophy wife, the secure pension, the stock options, then, at that point, I will pay attention to others. Then I will start giving to various causes. Then I will start getting into religion.”

Who do you think will find fulfillment and happiness? Who do you think is going to end up satisfied with what they have done with their life? The man who has spent years in self-forgetfulness, loving, encouraging, living for dozens of others and living for God? Or the man who pays most attention to himself?

I will tell you, friend, it is the first man and not the second. A person who focuses on others, on loving others and loving God is the one who ends up happiest and most fulfilled. You never get fulfillment directly. We get it indirectly through relationship. Through functioning as God's image. By being part of communities of love.

Let me close with a little children's story. Most of you probably read the Velveteen Rabbit when you were children or maybe you read it to your own children. It is a wonderful story. But here is a little section. I am going to close with it.

"The Velveteen Rabbit turned to the old wise experienced Skin Horse in the nursery and asked, 'What is real? Does it mean having things that buzz inside of you and a stick out handle?'

The Skin Horse replied, 'Real isn't how you are made. It is a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.'

'Does it hurt,' asked the Rabbit?

'Sometimes,' said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful.

'Does it happen all at once or bit by bit?'

‘It doesn’t happen all at once,’ said the Skin Horse, ‘You become – it takes a long time, generally by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off and your eyes drop out and you get very shabby. But once you are real, you cannot become unreal again. It lasts always.’”

The way you become really human, the way you fulfill your purpose as the image of God, is to really love and to really receive love. Along the way your hair falls out. Your eyes get dim. You get some wrinkles. But you show forth the image of God. And therein, we find our joy. And there we find ourselves.

And God said after all was created, it was very good. Let’s pray.

Who Am I?

September 23-24, 2000

Rich Nathan

Roots: A Study of the Genesis 1-11

Genesis 1:26-31

I. Who is God? (Genesis 1:26)

II. Who Am I ?

A. Made In God's Image (Genesis 1:26-27)

B. Made to Represent God's Rule (Genesis 1:26-30)

C. Made for Relationship (Genesis 1:27)