

SERIES: This We Believe

SERMON: **I Believe in Mankind, God's Highest Creation, Yet Fallen**

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 8

SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus

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My sermon today is entitled *Mankind, God's Highest Creation, Yet Fallen*. So far in this series we have had a sermon on *God the Father* and another on *The Bible*. Our proposed Free Church Statement of Faith continues in Article 3:

The Human Condition

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

Last Lord's Day during our musical worship we saw a video on Psalm 8. Let me read some verses from that great Psalm again this morning:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

(Verse 3) When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

I believe one of the neglected truths among evangelicals is the greatness and glory of man, which in turn reflects the greatness and glory of the God who created him. Psalm 8 says mankind was "Created a little lower than the heavenly beings." Many of you are familiar with the KJV rendering here, "a little lower than the angels." But the Hebrew literally reads, "a little lower than *Elohim, or God.*" Other Scripture passages indicate we are actually higher than angels in God's creative order and will someday judge them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Psalm also says of mankind that he is "crowned with glory and honor," and "ruler over the works of God's hands."

Now that's a description of how mankind was created and of God's original goal for mankind. It is not descriptive of the status of every person today. As a matter of fact, the depravity of man often seems more noticeable than his nobility, especially in an election year. In our culture we see immorality, corruption, perversion, and degradation of the most unimaginable variety, and we see it out in the open. But it was not always thus.

Mankind was created by God in His image and likeness. (Gen. 1:26-27)

There are really only three serious views of the origin of human life on this planet—organic evolution, special creation, and a compromise between the two known as theistic evolution. By the way, before I begin this discussion I realize that I cannot possibly satisfy everyone. In this church there are scientists who believe in evolutionary development, as well as young earth creationists who think the universe is only 6000 years old. I admit up front that I am not a scientist, but a person does not have to be a scientist in order to understand the philosophy of science. And the presuppositions we are wrestling with here are much more philosophical and theological than they are scientific. I will share with you my convictions and trust you to weigh them against the Scriptures.

Organic evolution claims that time and chance are adequate to explain the origin of mankind. The theory of evolution is assumed to be true without serious challenge by most of our higher educational institutions, by virtually every museum of antiquities, by our National Parks system, by the media, and by such venerable private institutions as the National Geographic Society. It is assumed to be true in the fields of biology, sociology, geology, paleontology, anthropology, history, political science, education, psychiatry, and comparative religions.

Julian Huxley stated many decades ago, “Darwin's theory of evolution is no longer a theory but a fact,” and the movie *Expelled* makes clear that most of the scientific community still agrees with that assessment. (A must-see movie, by the way. I can't remember the last time I recommended a movie; this is one you should see. You should also take your kids. It's rated P.G. because Edward R. Murrow is smoking a cigarette, but your kids can handle that. It's worth the price of admission just to see Richard Dawkins, the world's foremost militant atheist, make a fool out of himself).

Frankly, I think we should not be surprised that the theory of evolution has been accepted so thoroughly by our modern world. There is, after all, *some* evidence for evolution; if there weren't, the theory would have never achieved the wide acceptance it has today. Mutation, selective breeding, and the survival of the fittest are observable to a certain extent in the animal world. The fossil record reveals many extinct forms which appear to show stages of development toward *homo sapiens*, and these fossils are found in rock strata of apparent great antiquity. I don't think we should be reticent to acknowledge these facts.

The question is, “Is this evidence really sufficient to explain the existence of mankind or of the universe, *or* is the evolutionist making enormous assumptions and huge leaps of faith as he goes from the observable data to his conclusions?” I want to suggest to you that the latter is what is occurring. But if you didn't believe in the God of the Bible, how would *you* explain the origin of mankind? That question puts a little different perspective on the problem, doesn't it? The scientific community has decided in advance to reject any possible supernatural influence on the process. They don't ask whether there is evidence of God's fingerprints in nature. They close

their eyes to all but natural processes.

Given what they have left to work with, I'd say evolution is actually a rather creative solution (pardon the pun) to solve life's greatest mysteries, and I think we can admire the ingenuity of the system without buying into it. But for the evolutionist to claim that he's doing science while every other view is purely religious is poppycock. Both sides are making major assumptions about reality; both sides have a distinct world view; both sides are exercising faith. The evolutionist is just putting his faith in natural processes, all the while assuming there is no God, or if there happens to be one, He certainly had nothing to do with creating the universe as we know it.

Theistic evolution claims that God started the process, but then employed evolution to produce human life as we know it today. Some theistic evolutionists believe God created the first cell and then allowed evolution to take over. Others believe Adam was an island of special creation in a sea of evolution. Whatever the specifics, theistic evolution is essentially an effort to combine the conclusions of evolutionary scientists with the faith of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church has officially adopted theistic evolution, as has the liberal wing of the Protestant Church. The view has also made some inroads into evangelicalism.

I am personally convinced that many theistic evolutionists pursue the theory out of a desire for academic acceptance, but organic evolution and creationism are essentially antagonistic systems, and any attempt to wed them requires compromise and creates opposition from both sides. The fact is, if you have the God of the Bible, you don't need evolution to explain human life. And if you have organic evolution, you don't need the God of the Bible.

Special creation claims that God created human life (and the whole universe) in substantially the forms that we have today. If God has all power, then He could merely speak the world into existence, as several Scripture passages say He did. It would be no more difficult for Him to create man out of the dust of the ground or to hang the stars in space than it is for one of us to lift a pencil. Furthermore, if God has all knowledge, it would be no harder for Him to design the intricacies of the human body or the properties of DNA than for an architect to design a doghouse. The question, then, is not whether God *could have* created the universe as we know it, but whether He *did*.

The primary biblical information we have concerning creation comes from Genesis 1 and 2. Seventeen times God is said to be the Creator. He not only brought everything into existence, but He was also the designer of everything, as indicated by many words like "formed" and "planted." However, Genesis is not our only source of information. This is important because some biblical scholars dismiss Genesis as an ancient religious poem and thus feel no compulsion to wrestle with the claims of the text. The fact is at least four different New Testament books (Mark, Romans, 1 Corinthians and Revelation) confirm that God is the Creator, and the historicity of Adam is mentioned at least twelve times outside Genesis. The veracity of the whole Bible hangs on whether God indeed created the world as it claims.

But what are we as creationists to do with the evidence evolution presents, particularly for the antiquity of the earth? What do we do with the fossil record? What do we do about prehistoric animals like dinosaurs? Do we simply say, “I believe in creation and nothing else matters?” That doesn't sound very rational, and I don't think we need to do that.

Evangelicals often respond to the “evidence” presented by evolutionists by appealing to one or more of the following:

1. The universal flood of Noah's day. Frankly, this may be the single most important piece of evidence ignored entirely by the evolutionist. But if Scripture is truthful when it claims there was a universal flood in the third millennium B.C., (confirmed in the traditions of virtually every culture on earth), then the geological ramifications are staggering to the imagination. The extinction of dinosaurs, for example, might be explained by the fact that the post-flood earth was not conducive to their survival. The presence of human footprints or bones in the same strata as prehistoric animal fossils might be explained by the fact that they died together in the flood. The existence of fish fossils on the highest mountains does not necessarily demand ancient ice ages but might be explained by the Flood.

A second factor to which many creationists appeal is not particularly persuasive to me, but I mention it because it has been held by a number of evangelicals.

2. The gap theory of Genesis 1:1-2. It is important to note that the sequence of creation days in Genesis 1 does not begin until verse 3. The first two verses read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The gap theory suggests that there actually may have been two creations, a pre-creation in verse 1, followed by a chaotic stage and then a re-creation starting at the end of verse 2.

This fits the grammar, for in my Bible there is a footnote next to the word “was” in Gen. 1:2 suggesting that the Hebrew word there can be translated “became.” If we translate it that way we have the following, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth became formless and empty.” It's also important to note that Isaiah 45:18 says, “He who created the heavens . . . did not create it to be empty” (the exact same word as “formless” in Genesis 1:2). Now the argument is that if the earth was formless but God didn't create it that way, then it must have become that way through some external force. It's possible that force may have been the fall of Satan. In other words, when Satan fell, that which God had created in the beginning became formless, and then God decided to recreate the world, this time with mankind as the focal point.

A gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2 allows for the possibility of a very long period of time between the original creation and the re-creation of the world as we know it. Please understand this is merely a theory, but it does solve some problems. It also creates some, like the presence of death before human sin.

3. The day-age theory of creation days is likewise not persuasive to me. It is the view that the seven days of creation mentioned in Genesis 1 were not 24-hour days but rather long periods of time. After all, its adherents say, the Bible itself claims that "one day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." However, I personally think the primary motive behind this view is that it enables its adherents to accept much of the evolutionary time table while still seeing God's creative hand in it all. This theory also creates almost as many problems as it solves.

4. The apparent history theory is the second of these four issues that I find quite persuasive. Archbishop Ussher, as some of you are aware, determined from his study of the genealogies in Genesis that creation week occurred in 4004 B.C., and those dates were printed in virtually every English Bible for about two centuries. Bishop Lightfoot of Cambridge University in the late 19th century refined Ussher's date and asserted that Adam was created on October 23, 4004 B.C., at 9:00 A.M., 45th meridian time! This led Brewster to quip, "Closer than this, as a cautious scholar, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University did not venture to commit himself."

I personally feel no need to try to defend an age of the earth in the neighborhood of 6,000 years. But I also think that an age measured in hundreds of millions or billions of years is totally unnecessary. If God created the world, it would almost *have* to look older than it really is. Let me explain. Suppose you are in the Garden of Eden during the first week after Creation. You run into Adam. Does he have a beard? I suppose so, but why would someone only five days old have a beard? Because God created him to look, say 26 years old. Suppose you cut down a tree in the Garden of Eden. What would you find inside that tree? I suppose you'd find rings, because we cannot even conceive of a tree without rings. Yet rings are a sign of apparent age. What if you dug a well 4,000 feet deep. What would you expect to find? Probably oil. But what is oil? Oil, according to geologists, is the result of vegetation compacted over millions of years. Yet the earth is only five days old. Even when Jesus created something it looked older than it was. He created wine out of water and the guests commented that it was the best, meaning aged, though it was only moments old.

Now one can carry this too far. I would not want to suggest that God created dinosaur fossils when there never were any real dinosaurs—just to make scientists think the earth is older than it is. Rather I am suggesting that if God created anything, it would automatically look older than it really is. Therefore, we should not feel obligated to accept the *apparent* age of the earth, judged by geologists, as its *actual* age.¹

But more important than all our theories about origins is the clear biblical teaching about the image of God in mankind.

The image of God in mankind is what distinguishes him from every other creature, including angels. The uniqueness of man is not that he was created from the "dust" of the ground, or that he became a living being or that God saw His creation of man to be good, for all of these were true of the animals as well. What distinguishes mankind is that he was created in the image and likeness of God. No animal or plant or even angelic being is said to bear

God's image—only human beings.

What is that image? Well, it certainly is not physical, for as we saw several weeks ago God is spirit—immaterial and invisible. Rather the image of God consists of those features and characteristics of God of which man is a copy—features like personality, spirituality, creativity, morality, and imagination. There is no evidence that any of God's other earthly creatures share these features.

So far we have concluded that mankind was created by God in His own image. But we need to realize a second fact.

Mankind fell into sin, marring but not eradicating the image of God.

The first sin *mentioned* in the Bible is found in Gen. 3, when the serpent said to Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Adam and Eve responded to this temptation by disobeying God. But the first actual sin occurred long before that.

The first sin was in the angelic realm, while human sin originated in the Garden of Eden. 1 John 3:8 says, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” Many scholars believe that Ezekiel chapter 28 describes a spiritual battle that was fought in heaven probably long before the creation of man, when one of God’s archangels rebelled against God and, as a result, was cast out of His presence. Apparently one third of God's angels followed Satan in this rebellion and became fallen angels, or demons. When Satan saw that God was creating man in His own image, he focused his efforts at destroying that relationship, and he succeeded through temptation in getting man to rebel against His creator, just as Satan himself had done.

The Fall of mankind is as crucial to Christian theology as is his creation. Unfortunately, there are many who call themselves Christians who consider it little more than a true myth. One scholar wrote,

Unless we are invincible fundamentalists we know that Genesis 3 is properly to be regarded a “true myth”—that, though Eden is on no map and Adam's fall fits no historical calendar, that chapter witnesses to a dimension of human experience as present now as at the dawn of history—in plain terms, we are fallen creatures, and the story of Adam and Eve is the story of you and me.ⁱⁱ

Well, I guess that makes me an invincible fundamentalist, because I believe the story of Gen. 3 to be both truth and fact.

Satan's principal tactic was to question the goodness of God and then challenge His authority. He focused Eve's attention on the one restriction God had put on her and Adam, namely that they weren't to eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The tree was called that because it was destined to reveal whether man would allow God to determine for him the difference between good and evil, or whether man would decide that for himself.

When God placed the man and the woman in Eden to be his vicereagents on earth, he gave them the maximum freedom, authority and dominion possible for created beings. They were to rule the earth for him. And there were no apparent restrictions on how they were to do it. In fact, there was only one restriction of any kind on them—they were not to eat of one tree in the Garden. But Satan came and offered this argument:

All restrictions are bad.

God's plan is restrictive.

Therefore, God's plan is bad.

And Satan offered Eve an alternative plan without restrictions.

Friends, this is still Satan's game plan today:

“A good God wouldn't restrict salvation to one way.”

“A good God wouldn't refuse our human desires for pleasure.”

“A good God wouldn't want me to stay in a marriage where my needs aren't being met.”

The whole problem, however, is that the major premise—that all restrictions are bad—is not true. Some restrictions are for our protection, some for education. Everyone of us puts restrictions on our children—not because we hate them or want to make them miserable but because we love them and want them to survive and mature. Even with the great freedom and dominion Adam and Eve enjoyed, they still need to be reminded that they were God's creatures. The one restriction God gave was to remind them that they were responsible to God, not independent from Him.

When Eve, then Adam, acted on Satan's temptation the results were devastating. They experienced guilt and shame for the first time, they lost the spontaneous fellowship they had enjoyed with God, they began to make excuses and place blame on each other, Eve was cursed with pain in childbirth and submission to her husband, Adam was condemned to difficult labor, they were driven from the Garden, the ground was cursed, and most tragically, they began to experience spiritual and physical death.

Now it is very important that we understand the nature of sin. A lot of people have a very limited view of it as “hurting other people” or “breaking the Ten Commandments.” Here is a definition of sin that is pretty comprehensive:

Sin is any lack of conformity to or transgression of the character or law of God. It's not just what we do, it's what we are. It involves not only what we commit, but also what we omit. The Scriptures reveal three different aspects of sin:

1. Original sin (imputed sin) is the guilt of Adam's sin which is charged to every man's account. (Rom. 5:12). This is not a very popular concept today. In fact, it is difficult to imagine anything more offensive to ideas of human justice and fair play than guilt by imputation. (Of course, we had better be careful here, because if we reject the imputation of Adam's guilt, we must also reject the imputation of Christ's righteousness!). But fair or not, that's what Rom. 5:12 teaches: “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all

men.” Later in verse 18 Paul says “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men.” One of the key lessons we should learn from this is that what we do *does* affect others. If anyone could have made a case for the notion that “it's nobody's business what we do in our own garden,” Adam and Eve could have. But it turned out to be *everyone's* business.

But even if you reject the concept of original sin, you're still not out of the woods.

2. Sin nature, which is the tendency to sin that is inherited from one's parents. The theological terminology often used for the inherited sin nature is “total depravity.” That term doesn't mean that every man is as thoroughly wicked as he can possibly be, nor that sinners are unable to act in positive ways toward one another, but it does imply that there is no spiritual good in man, that there is nothing to commend him to God, and that depravity extends to every part of man's nature—His intellect, his emotions, and his will. David said that “in sin my mother conceived me,” indicating the term “innocent child” is actually a misnomer. Cute? Yes. Cuddly? Yes. Innocent? No.

But even if one rejects both original sin and the inherited sin nature, he still can't get away from the third category.

3. Personal sin. The Bible makes it clear that every man misses the mark through act, thought, and attitude. Rom. 3:23 says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Do you remember how our Statement of Faith put it: “Human beings are sinners by nature and by choice”?

Personal sin is most often described in the Scriptures, not as smoking, drinking, swearing, or driving too fast, but in terms like rebellion, pride, unfaithfulness, covenant-breaking, and usurping God's authority. We don't like to think of our behavior in such terms. We prefer to speak of mistakes we have made, imperfections, moral flaws, weakness, failure, deficiency, addiction, sickness, or even victimization. Karl Meninger of psychiatric fame asked the question as the title of a book, *Whatever Happened to Sin?* Well, nothing happened to sin; we just started calling it by different names.

Friends, how serious is the human sin problem? It is extremely serious, for

Sin results in estrangement from God and carries with it the death penalty. (Rom. 6:23). In the long history of the human race there have been only three basic views of human nature. They may be summarized as the views man is well, man is sick, or man is dead. Humanists unite in saying that man is well. The Enlightenment produced this doctrine of the innate goodness of man. It is a pernicious doctrine, so discredited that it is hard to understand how anyone who ever had a two-year-old can hold to it.

Proponents of the view that man is sick do not see the situation as hopeless. With proper care, drugs, psychiatry, and self-help seminars, and with the correction of the myriad of social ills that prevail in our culture, we can make him better. Even if some diseases of the soul are beyond our

ability to cure now, not all are, and even the remaining problems may be solved eventually. There is no need to call the mortician yet.

But the biblical view is that man is neither well nor merely sick. Actually, he is already dead, so far as his relationship with God is concerned. He is “dead in trespasses and sins,” according to Ephesians 2:1.ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 6:23 adds, “The wages of sin is death.” From the moment of birth we begin to die physically as the forces unleashed by sin begin to take their toll on our bodies. Some die *directly* as the result of sin—victims of drunk drivers or violence or drug abuse. Others die *indirectly* as the result of sin—victims of cancer, stroke, or old age.

But, far more seriously, the wages of sin also includes spiritual death, i.e. separation from God. Adam and Eve enjoyed unadulterated fellowship with God as they walked with Him in the cool of the evening in the Garden. We, however, are born into this world estranged from our Creator. Sin has done a number on us that separates us from a holy God.

Sin has also marred, or perhaps we should even say shattered, the image of God in man, but it has not eradicated it. Vestiges of the image remain in every man. As a matter of fact, the Book of James argues against cursing on the basis that the one we curse is created in God's image. It says in 3:9: “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”

We have seen the terrible problem of sin in all its devastation, but thankfully we don't have to stop there, for God has provided a solution.

The solution to human sin is God's plan of salvation. That will be Josh's topic in a few weeks, so I don't want to steal his thunder. But on the chance that someone here this morning might enter eternity between now and then, never having another opportunity to get right with God, I want to quote the rest of Rom. 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, *but* the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Our sin problem is enormous, but God solved it by sending His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us and purchase for us the free gift of salvation.^{iv}

Conclusion: The Psalmist asked, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?” He was amazed that God would care so much for someone who is such a tiny speck in an immense universe. But He does. We should still be amazed. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

i. I personally believe debates over the age of the earth generate more heat than light. On the other hand, when we see newspaper articles about some new bone discoveries in East Africa pushing the date of prehistoric man back another hundred million years, we should realize that such claims are so dependent upon philosophical presuppositions that they shouldn't even be considered scientific.

ii. Archibald Hunter, *Interpreting Paul's Gospel*, 77.

iii. James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 200.

iv. If I had time, I would make one final point: **Mankind has been given a divine mandate to rule the Earth.** (Gen. 1:26, 28) In Gen. 1:26, 28 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.” . . . 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.”

The importance of this in our day and time is that there is a growing number of animal rights activists, tree huggers, and environmental radicals who have lost sight completely of the uniqueness of man and his place in the created order. Granted, man was commanded to fill the earth and subdue it, not abuse it. Therefore, we should be opposed to indiscriminate killing of any kind and the waste of precious natural resources.

In fact, I believe evangelicals should be among the leaders in the environmental movement. I think we should detest littering, we should support the maintenance and expansion of our national parks, and we should be concerned about any global warming that is caused by human behavior. However, anyone who equates the life of a snail darter with human life or, worse yet, fights for the protection of turtle eggs *while* taking a pro-choice position on abortion, is simply oblivious to the biblical teaching on man's relationship to the Earth.