

Eternity in Our Hearts

Sunday Jan 9, 2011

Introduction:

In the summer of 2005, the London Zoo featured eight homo sapiens in a sealed enclosure next to another sealed enclosure of various primates. The goal of the exhibit, according to Zoo spokesperson Polly Wills, was to downplay the uniqueness of human beings as a species and "teach members of the public that the human is just another primate."

Tom Mahoney, one of the eight volunteer participants in the exhibit, said: "A lot of people think that humans are above other animals," he said. "When they see humans as animals, here, it kind of reminds them that we're not that special." [*"Humans Are Ones on Display at London Zoo," yahoonews (8-26-05); Sam O'Neal, St. Charles, Illinois.*]

BUT, according to teaching of the Bible, we're unique and special, as Pastor Steve reminded us last Sunday; that humankind is crowned with honour, glory, dignity, & worth. As Jesus teaches in the Gospels, we're far more valuable than lilies in the field and birds in the sky. We're the apex of creation, set apart from everything else that God created:

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ..." 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them ...

"Image of God" means a resemblance, an exact replica or copy of the original, a tangible manifestation of God on earth, and underscores a relationship of dependence as a derivative of the God-reality. As in Gen. 5:3 where it says, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth."

Humankind made in the image of God has a filial relationship and as God's children we have the capacity to reflect His attributes and to act on His behalf, mirroring divine personality and character traits, purpose, and responsibility.

Paul teaches in Eph. 4:24, "... to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

The God in whose image we are created, and whom we are to reflect, is the same God whom Moses encountered, identifying Himself as "I AM"; the same One the apostle John's recorded in his heavenly vision as, "the Alpha and the Omega," the eternal God. And the prophet Isaiah writes in Is. 57:15, "For this is what the high and exalted One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and

lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

This reflects the similar sentiment of Solomon who says in Eccl. 3, “There is a time for everything ...¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

We’re created, designed, and wired for eternity. The apostle Paul attested to the same truth in Athens:

Acts 17:26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

This sense of yearning for something/someone beyond ourselves and this world is also observed or acknowledged by philosophers and theologians, e.g., “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man that cannot be filled by created being, but by God alone made known through Jesus Christ.” [Blaise Pascal]

Canadian missionary and popular author Don Richardson in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts* (1981), relates many

fascinating stories of how different peoples and cultures have a tradition of worshipping one true deity whom they believed to be eternal, all-powerful, perfect and unsearchable. God has indeed put “eternity in their hearts”.

If that is indeed the case, then John Piper’s insight is instructive and challenging; he writes in his book, *The Pleasure of God*, p. 11: “God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him.”

If so, how then shall we live? Let me suggest this to begin with:

Cultivate an intimate relationship with our Father-God.

Let us look at Gen. 1:26 again: “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ...”

While many theologians have suggest that the use of the personal plurals points to the doctrine of the trinity, however it’s best to understand that it underscores God’s deliberation in the heavenly council before all angelic beings and in contrast to other creatures not created in God’s image. Here, of course, the emphasis is on personal vs. impersonal nature of God; ultimate reality is not any created things or the universe or a George Lucas’ *Star War*-like impersonal force but an infinite and loving Being. As Ken Boa says, “God is an intensely personal and relational Being, and it is an insult for us to treat him as though he

were a power or a principle.” [*Conformed to His Image*, p. 192.]

“Made in our image” implies that humanity was created with the capacity for relationship with God, not just a possibility or an *I-It* relationship. God desires an *I-Thou* relationship and extends a partnership with Him in all areas of life. And out of this personal, intimate relationship we live out our full potential and fulfill our aspirations.

Oswald Chambers’ words are penetrating: “A saint is a creature of vast possibilities, knit into shape by the ruling personality of God.”

Allow me to suggest the following passage to you as a practical pointer to developing intimacy with God our Father: “¹ Thess. 5:16 Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances ...”

Human beings are the only worshipping “animals”; in worship God draws us closer and we become more alive. As the song says,

Day by day
Day by day
Oh Dear Lord
Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly

Follow thee more nearly
Day by day

Libby and I started using a resource recommended by Pastors Steve & Jeremy: *Common Prayer – A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*. We have a mini-church service each day after breakfast; and I also took up Gary Moon’s suggestion to put on my daily schedule, “An Appointment with God”.

As we cultivate this personal relationship with our heavenly Father, in our earthly sojourn we allow eternity to “knit us into shape” when we ...

Align our perspectives, priorities, and practices with the Eternal.

Again, look at Eccl. 3: “¹ There is a time for everything ...¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

“Eternity in the human heart” is set in view of “He has made everything beautiful in its time”, i.e., God’s sovereignty and purpose. Our concern for the future, our curiosities about the meaning and purpose of life, our sense of wonder about to where our future is leading, our desire to understand the parts in relation to the whole, all underline our inability to control our destiny, our yearning for eternity, and serve as a compass pointing to the true north, God.

As A. W. Tozer has reminded us that our finitude reminds us of the Infinite God who is in control and knows all about us: “God dwells in eternity, but time dwells in God. He has already lived all our tomorrow’s as he has lived all our yesterdays.”

Having put eternity in human hearts and out of a renewed and intimate relationship with God made available through Jesus, Paul reminds us focus on things above: “Col. 3:1 ... set your hearts on things above ... ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things ... ⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature ... ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Of course, for as long as we are on this side of eternity and await the eventual eradication of all evil, we can expect the pull toward the temporal, but that doesn’t mean that we should settle for anything less than the eternal. As C.S. Lewis suggests, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”

Lewis in *Mere Christianity* talks about the significance and effect of every decision we made – every choice helps to form our character/self – and our life as a whole is shaped by all our choices; we can turn into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred

with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. As creatures of heaven we have joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be creatures of hell means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is moving to one state or the other.

As we aim for heaven, we should evaluate our value system and make intentional adjustments when necessary. Our practices/behaviours reveal more than we want to admit or profess.

Tozer provides some helpful guidance:

Rules for Self-Discovery

- What we want most.
- What we think about most.
- How we use our money.
- What we do with our leisure time.
- The company we enjoy.
- Who and what we admire.
- What we laugh at.

Conclusion: I like to close this message with a question followed by an exercise you might want to do in the coming week.

Q: If you were to live the present life over and over forever, would you choose the way you are living now?

Exercise: Write your own eulogy that will be well received in eternity.