

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 38 - PERSONHOOD]

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***Jesus after being sentenced, humiliated and beaten, is led to face his agonizing death on the cross.***

- ◆ However, Jesus' death on the cross was not a normal human death.
- ◆ To understand why, we have to go back to the original creation of man.
- ◆ We discussed earlier the distinction between the animal kingdom and human beings.
- ◆ It was not animals God created "in His image" but rather humans. Unlike animals, we have the ability to "know" good and evil and the capacity to "choose" between good and evil.
- ◆ The fact that the first humans sinned showed they were not truly in God's image at that time, and creating humans truly in His image is a work in progress.
- ◆ However, mankind was created with abilities far beyond the animal kingdom most of which relate to the human "mind" e.g. consciousness, ability to think outside of ourselves, ability to communicate, to create, ability to plan, sense of justice, and most importantly, the ability to relate to others.
- ◆ God built into us humans the ability and need for relationship with others, both on a physical, emotional and social level with other humans, and on a spiritual level with our heavenly Father.
- ◆ It is these qualities, along with individual talents, abilities and personality that distinguish each of us as a unique "person."
- ◆ God did not walk and talk with the animals in the Garden, but with the unique human persons showing we occupied a special place in God's eyes.
- ◆ One could make a good argument that when God breathed the breath of life into man it was more than just air to start the cardiovascular process.
- ◆ It could be argued it was at this time that God gave us these unique human abilities, which distinguish us from the animal kingdom that also allows us to relate socially to Him and others (Genesis 2:7).
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, neurologists still can't distinguish the physiological causes of this quantum gap between the animal and human brain.
- ◆ It's interesting to note Jesus did something similar when He commissioned the disciples at the beginning of the new spiritual creation and breathed the Holy Spirit on them (John 20:22).
- ◆ However, these unique human persons shared many other qualities with the animal kingdom, most of which related to physical survival.
- ◆ We were even created on the sixth day along with the land animals.
- ◆ We all need air, food, water and sleep for continued existence. We also share with the rest of creation the relentless process of decay built into the life of the universe.
- ◆ Which also means we share with the animal kingdom a biological death.

***But unlike the animal kingdom, we humans face the prospect of an additional death. This death has more lethal consequences than the physical death we share with animals.***

- ◆ Right from the beginning, God warned Adam and Eve about the consequences of this additional death.
- ◆ This death was not brought on by mere physical means such as an accident or a deterioration of one's health; it was brought on as a result of a moral deficiency.
- ◆ The distinction between these two deaths is made when God commands Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- ◆ ***Genesis 2:16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."***
- ◆ Now we know that Adam and Eve didn't drop dead on the day they took of the forbidden fruit. They lived out their physical lives, had children and died the normal biological death appointed to both animals and humans.
- ◆ This natural death should not be confused with God's judgment on them for their disobedience.
- ◆ However, something else died on the very day they ate of the fruit.
- ◆ Prior to their disobedience in rejecting God's command not to eat of the tree, the "persons" of Adam and Eve had uninterrupted communion with God. They enjoyed God's presence.
- ◆ This special relationship they had with their Creator came to an abrupt end when they were literally cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24).

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- ◆ This symbolised a change of status between God, the source of life, and mankind whose continued existence relied on this vital relationship.
- ◆ This was not just the death of a physical body but also the death of “personhood” whose continued existence relied on the relationship between God and humans.
- ◆ Humanity was not created with an immortal soul, but had the capacity to move from the mortal to the immortality by partaking of the tree of life.
- ◆ It was disobedience or sin that led to this rupture the consequences of which would lead to not only physical death, but also spiritual death if this rupture were not somehow repaired.
- ◆ This is the death of the “person” Jesus warned about in Matthew 10:28.
- ◆ **Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**
- ◆ Jesus in this verse is distinguishing between a biological death, the “body,” and a spiritual death of the person, the “soul.”
- ◆ In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t fear man who can only inflict biological death, but rather fear God who controls the ultimate destiny of the “person” even though you may have to put at jeopardy your own physical life.

**As we have seen which is implicit in God’s statement, “Let us make man in our image,” God’s purpose for humankind is life not death. It is a life lived in eternal communion in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

- ◆ But now, because of sin, that goal has been put in jeopardy. Humankind has been cut off from the life-sustaining source of immortality that can only come from God Himself, pictured by the tree of life.
- ◆ Not only will mankind experience a natural biological death but also a second death of “personhood” and with it the ability to transcend physical life and join His creator in eternal life.
- ◆ Adam, along with the rest of mankind, is judged as sinners and therefore deserving of this second death, the death of the person.

**However, God is not going to allow this to happen. His purpose of making mankind in His image will stand.**

- ◆ So in order to reverse the damage done by Adam, God in the incarnate person of Jesus Christ, elects in love to substitute Himself in the place of sinful mankind and bear this second death so the relationship between the two parties can be restored.
- ◆ **Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**
- ◆ Notice the two aspects of Christ’s righteous act. First, we are justified, i.e. restored to a right legal standing with God, but secondarily, this righteous act also gives access to **“life for all people.”**
- ◆ The unique “person” Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, sacrificed Himself on the cross to enable our unique “persons” to again have access to the life-sustaining source of immortality that can only come from God Himself.
- ◆ Jesus substituted Himself in our place and allowed Himself to be cut off from His heavenly Father which resulted in His terrible cry, **“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) (Matthew 27:46).**
- ◆ Of course the Father had not abandoned Him, He was right there by His side through the whole ordeal (Psalms 22:1,24).
- ◆ Even though Jesus knew He was about to enter that God-forsaken abode, hell, He willingly inserted Himself in order for humanity to regain access to the true source of life, God.
- ◆ Mankind, since the sin in the garden has been living in its own type of hell as it has cut itself off from the source of true life.
- ◆ Not only did Jesus insert Himself into this man-made hell with His incarnation, but with His atonement inserted Himself into the second death hell reserved for the destruction of the “person.”

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- ◆ This is the hell Jesus spoke about metaphorically in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man to describe the plight of mankind were it not for God's work of salvation to cross this vast gulf between "hell," life apart from God, and "heaven," life with God.
- ◆ **Luke 16:22-26** *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."*
- ◆ All mankind, because of our sin, find ourselves in the same plight as the rich man. There is nothing we can do to cross this great chasm that separates us from the source of eternal life.
- ◆ However, there is a Savior, Jesus Christ who is able and did cross this chasm on our behalf so we didn't have to experience the second death that results in permanent isolation from God, which the Bible calls "hell."
- ◆ This is the powerful simplicity of Paul's statement in **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death* (the second death, the permanent death of the person), *but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- ◆ The difference between the two men's destination described in this parable is not because one was more righteous or less wealthy than the other, but simply because Lazarus accepted the gift of grace of His Savior and the rich man did not.
- ◆ Other descriptions of hell in the New Testament, where men are "cast into outer darkness, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 22:13); "Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48); and "...the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night" (Revelation 14:11), are simply metaphorical descriptions of the fate of mankind were it not for Jesus' willingness to insert Himself into our "hell" of being cut off from the source of true life, God.
- ◆ **Galatians 3:13** *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*  
**If Jesus has died the second death for us and He has descended into hell for us, (as the Apostle's Creed states), then where does this leave man's relationship to the source of true life?**
- ◆ Well, as we saw earlier, the veil separating a sinful mankind from a holy God has been torn asunder by the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Now instead of man being driven from access to the presence of God as portrayed by Adam and Eve being driven from the garden, Jesus, as the "way" and the source of "life" invites mankind back into the presence of God.
- ◆ The pathway back to the source of true life has been restored through Jesus Christ.
- ◆ He has made it possible for our "person" to live again.
- ◆ But as we will soon look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will see it is not just restitution to physical life, but the opportunity to inherit eternal life and live forever in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.