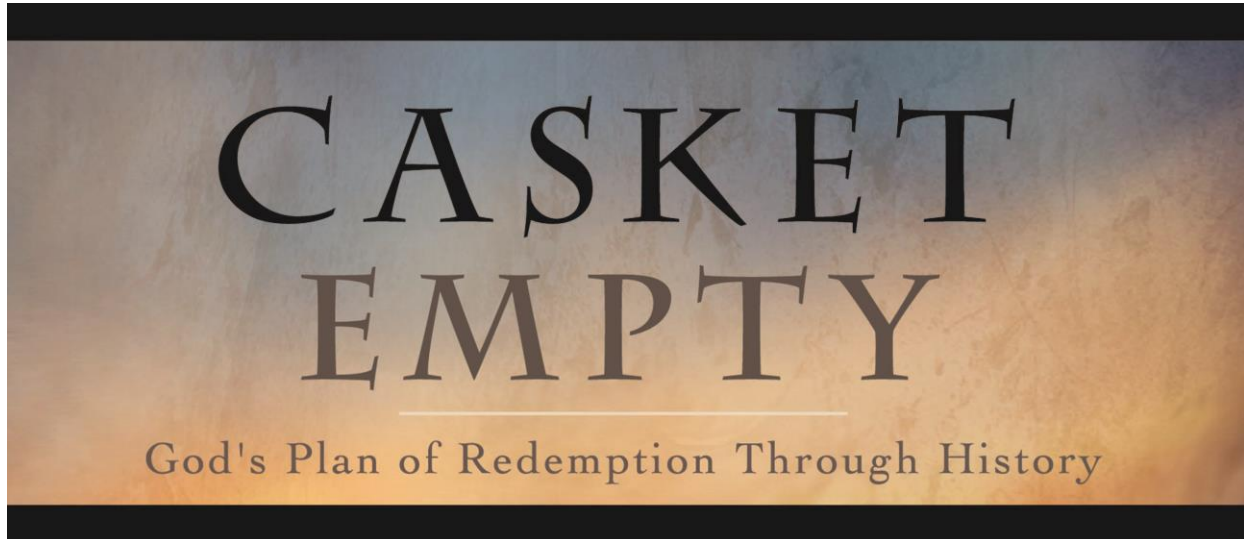


***C is for Creation***  
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
September 10, 2017

**TEXT: Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8**



We continue in our fall series that begins the year for us with the acronym CASKET EMPTY. This fall we will be looking at the great sweep of the Old Testament narrative, and this morning we start with *C is for CREATION*. We will look at the revelation of God that comes to us in the opening chapters of the Bible. I want to begin with two questions. They are questions that lurk within our hearts. Sometimes they are articulated; sometimes they are unspoken. They are questions that are deep within us, and they are the questions: Who am I? and Why am I here? These are not trick questions. They are questions that lie close at hand for every one of us, and the Scriptures tell us the answer to those questions in a very breathtaking view of what it means to be human beings. The Bible begins with creation, revealing God as the Creator and then showing that we are created uniquely in His image and likeness. I want to tell you upfront that the Bible has a very high view of humanity; the Bible has a higher view of you than you do. This view of humanity as unique in the image and likeness of God carries with it a purpose, and that purpose is to reflect and represent God in the world. It is a very, very high calling. Some of you may be tempted this morning to just run out right now. It's like receiving the job description of a new position, and you think, "I'm unqualified. It's overwhelming, and I'll need to look somewhere else."

The Bible's vision of who we are is stunning, and we have the privilege of looking at it together this morning. So keep your Bible open to this very first section. We want to close in on Genesis 1:26-28 as we begin. In Genesis 1:26, at the climax of the narrative of creation, God says these stunning words:

*“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”*

God uses the Royal *we* of the court of heaven here, It's a summons to create humanity, Adam, after God's image and likeness. When we ask the question: What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? the answer comes in the next declaration. God explains to us right at the beginning that to be made in His image and likeness, means in the rest of Genesis 1:26:

*“And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

To exercise dominion is not to domineer or lord over, but it reflects a royal calling for humanity to have dominion, to exercise rule, to be responsible, to be in charge over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the livestock, over all the earth. The very opening chapter of the Bible says that humanity in God's image and likeness is entrusted with the sacred responsibility over all the earth. It's a very high calling. When we were in Boston a couple weeks ago and had the chance to see humpback whales swimming in their native habitat, I questioned this for a moment. When you see something the size of a school bus come leaping out of the water and splash down next to you, you wonder, “Am I responsible for that creature?” Yet in a very profound way, the Scriptures advise us to see that we are, and we will continue to explore this: to reflect God's righteous rule, to be in His image and likeness, to exercise dominion or God's sovereignty in a wise stewardship over all creation. This declaration or intention of God in Genesis 1:26 then is carried out. In Genesis 1:27, we read:

*“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*

So God did it. Both men and women reflect this divine image. Though there is a distinction of persons, there is a unity in relationship, and together we reflect His image. Parents, don't you love how God acts in Scripture when He just says something and then it happens? Don't you wish you could operate like that all the time. God speaks, and then He does it. God blesses them in Genesis 1:28. The Lord gives us not only a statement of who we are, but He tells us about why we are here. In Genesis 1:28, under the blessing of God, God speaks to humanity with a summons:

*“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”*

This language of *subdue* means to *bring it underneath God's righteous, wise, sovereignty*—to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth. God's blessing and commission to humanity is nothing less than to fill the earth with image bearers of the Most High, and to multiply, to fill it. Humanity displays God's fruitfulness and blessing, the pluripotency of life. To be made in God's image tells us uniquely who we are and also why we are here. God gives to humanity a certain set of gifts and abilities that go with the task that He gives. It would be cruel to give someone a task or responsibility and not the gifts to carry it out, and yet God gives both of these to humanity, to you and to me.

Theologians throughout church history have often gravitated towards thinking what it means specifically to be in God's image and likeness. Sometimes we take a narrow view of that, but actually I want to invite you this morning to take a very broad view of that, to consider what it means uniquely to be a person. It means to be endowed with certain capacities and gifts. These gifts must be exercised if indeed the earth is to be filled with image bearers who can know in response to God in praise. Our rational abilities, our power to think means that humanity is reflecting God in this way, that we can think God's thoughts after Him. We are given a moral capacity to recognize the difference between right and wrong, and this reflects the moral nature of God. He is the supreme determiner of right and wrong. The trees cannot do this. We have been given capacity for fellowship with God in worship, and this reflects the fellowship that God Himself enjoys, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with each other. We have been given the ability to respond to God and to fellow human beings, and this imitates God's ability and willingness to respond to Him in prayer. We have been given the ability to make meaningful decisions, and this reflects in a very small way the supreme directing power of God who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will. We have been given a sense of beauty that reflects the God who scatters beauty profusely over snow-crowned mountains, lake-jeweled valleys, and awe-inspiring sunsets. We have been given a gift of speech, which is an imitation of God who speaks to us and makes the world that reveals His will to us through His spoken Word. We have been given a gift of song that echoes God who rejoices over us with singing. To be made in the image and likeness of God is to be given a set of gifts and abilities that the exercise of them reflects the dominion and person and power of God. Humanity is installed as the sub vice-regent over all creation. I know that we are not used to thinking of ourselves in this way. We have a tendency on the one hand to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to, and this comes about where we think to use others for our own gain or to exploit the resources of this world for our own increase.

We tend to think of ourselves pridefully on the one hand, but on the other hand, we equally have a temptation to think of ourselves as less than we ought to. We have a temptation to think of ourselves as not any different from anything else in all creation, that we are of the

same value as the animals or even the forests. But, you see the vision of humanity in Genesis 1, and the close-up view in Genesis 2, is a view of persons as we are. You and I reflect the King of the universe. We are uniquely made in His image and likeness and given a set of gifts to carry that out, to reflect Him in this world. The narrative of Genesis 1 gives us a grand view of humanity installed as God's representative ruler in the world.

Genesis 1 invites our attention and study from many angles, and I want to consider one angle on it briefly this morning. Reading of Genesis 1 helps us see our place in the whole scheme. The Bible begins by telling us that God has no rivals. Aren't you glad for that? The Bible doesn't begin with a philosophical defense of God's existence. Aren't you glad for that? The Bible just begins with God and God speaking, and God ordering the world, and He orders the world by a series of declarations that create by separating spheres. Day One, God creates light and darkness; Day Two, God speaks and separates the sky and the sea; Day Three, God speaks again and separates the land and the sea. In each of these spheres of creation, God creatively, as the Artisan, as the Designer of this world, then installs rulers in those spheres. Corresponding to Day One is Day Four: the spheres of light and darkness, God installs the sun and the moon to govern. Genesis 1:16 says:

*“God made two great lights—the greater light **to govern** [or rule] the day and the lesser light **to govern** the night.”*

Why are they there? The sun rules the day and the moon rules the night. Day Five, the spheres of sky and sea are then filled with life and creatures who rule those domains. The waters teem with living creatures; the birds teem and fly across the vault of the sky. Finally, we come to Day Six in the narrative of creation, and the separate spheres of land and sea, and God creates living creatures on the land, and the climax of creation is humanity, and they are said again to rule. Notice that they rule over all of the spheres: they rule over the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, the wild animals, and over all the creatures. Humanity's function in this universe as an image bearer of God means that we reflect God's righteous rule and care, and we are to fill the earth. Filling of the earth means that we imitate God in His creative power; it means that we were given a great, sacred responsibility over the earth and all that is within it. In this way, we reflect our heavenly Father. The narrative of creation ends with Day Seven as God is enthroned as Ruler, King over all, and we rightly find our place, not as king—as God is King over all—not as just part of creation, but uniquely in His image and likeness.

Genesis 2 gives us a close-up view. When people take pictures, some people love to take a wide-angle view. Others take close-up views, portraits. Genesis 2 was like a complementary portrait where humanity comes into focus—who we are. We discover that humanity, uniquely made in God's image, gets extra care and attention. God doesn't narrate the creation of the

animals in the same way. When we turn in Scripture to the complementary narrative of creation in Genesis 2, we find out even more about who we are and why we are here. Genesis 2 tells us the account of God's creative activity and that He forms humanity, man. The Hebrew word is *Adam*. He forms Adam from the dust of the ground. In Hebrew, it's a play on words. It says that God creates or fashions *adam* from the *adama*. He makes man from the dirt, and so the original creation of humanity. It's like a *dirt man*. Some spouses are thinking, "That's why I've got to clean up after you all the time!" We were originally made of the raw material, if you will, of this earth. We're made of earth, and yet we are more than just earth. We are made of the ground, the elements in the earth, and yet God breathes into us His Holy Spirit and we become alive. Humanity is made in His image and likeness. We are both body and soul, and these both come from God. We are made then, and God places us in a garden in the opening scenes of Scripture. It is a garden that God Himself plants. Don't miss that. God is not only the Creator of the world, He is also the cultivator of it. Some have been scandalized by this image that God is depicted as a Gardener in the opening scenes, and yet God is much more than a simple gardener growing backyard vegetables. God is cultivating the earth, making it grow and flourish. Being in His image and likeness means that we too are responsible to cultivate it. God plants a garden in Eden, a place of pleasure and delight. *Eden* in Hebrew means of *a place of abundance and pleasure*. It's a fantastic place. The Septuagint translation of the Garden of Eden renders this expression with the Greek word *paradise*, and that is where we get the original *paradise*. A *paradeza* is actually a Persian word that means an *enclosed park or royal pleasure garden*. Eden is in this world the place of God's presence and fellowship with Him, and humanity, male and female, are placed within it. God takes humanity in Genesis 2:15 and places him in the Garden of Eden and tells him that he is there both to work it and to take care of it.

We need both of these things. Humanity is in the Garden with real responsibility to nurture and conserve the perfection of the garden, and we do this with the labor of our hands. Yet, gloriously, in the original scene of creation this labor is exerted meaningfully, and nature responds easily to our efforts. We have to always remember that work is not part of the curse. God created us to cultivate, but it's work like you always dreamed of it. It's like coming up with a plan and strategy and just doing it, and it works. There is no tension; there is no hostility; there are no opposing market forces; there is no strategic initiative that falls flat, no miscommunication among members of your team. It just works. Can imagine that? Some of you can't even imagine it because your whole life experience has been lived outside the Garden of Eden, and you're used to thinking of work as difficult, strenuous, failing eight or nine times out of ten. But, you see, we are there in the Garden, in the beginning, in God's image and likeness, and we need the complementary pictures of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Genesis 1 says that we in the image and likeness of God reflect God's righteous rule, His dominion over all creation, and Genesis 2 places us in a specific location and tells us that we are there to serve the earth and

also to cultivated it, to work the land and to take care of it. We need both of these images. It's of great interest to note that the Hebrew words described for our activity in Genesis 2 are the same words that can be used for *worship* and *protect*. We are there in the Garden to worship God, to watch over, to care for this world. You can't just read that we are here to rule over it and apply our fallen humanity outside the Garden. When we do that, we inevitably exploit the world; we exploit relationships. But, it's a very high and lofty vision that's given to us in these opening chapters.

The Bible tells us that we are here to reflect God's rule. It means we are here also to explore the resources of the earth, to cultivate its land, to mine its treasures. We are here also to cultivate spheres of technology, agriculture, horticulture. It means that science, technology, and art are part of the expression of real humanity. Genesis 1 and 2 are not opposed to science. They give a foundation for it. Genesis 1 and 2 give us an imperative to create technology and art. Genesis 1 and 2 give us a vision where we are to stand underneath God's sovereignty, and we rule over nature, but we rule in such a way that we are also its servant. It means that we are to conserve natural resources, to make the best possible use of them. It means that we have to be concerned to prevent the erosion of the soil, the destruction of forests, the irresponsible use of energy, pollution of rivers and lakes, pollution of the air we breathe. It means that we must be wise stewards of the earth and of all that is in it. It means that humanity promotes and preserves what's useful and beautiful to the glory of God. That's our calling. The environmental concern of the earth should not be a flag of the liberal agenda. We are the only ones that actually have a theological foundation for caring about it. Sometimes it creeps into our mind in our zeal for evangelism that this world doesn't count. It's going to be burned up and destroyed, but the scriptural vision is of a renewed heavens and earth. That means that we are actually responsible for it. It means that evangelism can flourish in a world where people have enough to eat. It is hard to pay attention to preaching of the gospel when you can't breathe the air. We often want to dodge our responsibility, but humanity, male and female, is given this beautiful picture. It's a picture of why we are here that has at least three dimensions. Let me just lay these out.

We have this dimension vertically that we are here to worship God, to know Him and respond to Him in praise. It means that humanity has a horizontal aspect to our existence where we are in relationship with each other and we reflect the righteousness of God in those relationships, where we deploy the full resources of our thinking, of our speech, of our ability to make meaningful decisions, to sacrifice for the good of those around us, and imitate the righteousness of God our heavenly Father in our horizontal relationships. We also have a relationship that is under our feet. We have a relationship under our feet to the ground on which we walk. In a very profound, really meaningful sense, we are responsible for this place,

and we imitate our heavenly Father in so doing. In the Garden of Eden, God gives us even more detail about who we are and why we are here. The Lord says in Genesis 2:18:

*“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

Some of us revolt against this sentiment. We say, “I need my alone time.” We were not created as individuals to be individuals. The biblical vision of humanity is a corporate image. It is actually not good to be alone. Some have a call to singleness, but even those with a call to singleness still are married in the bride of Christ. We are not created to be alone. God says, *“It is not good. I'll make a helper suitable for him.”* The Lord makes a companion for Adam, taking a rib from his side. Note the complementary picture of standing side-by-side, male and female, one not standing above the other or in front, but side-by-side. It is a very beautiful picture. Husbands and wives next to each other will know uniquely the vulnerability and weakness of the other, and that vulnerability and weakness will be exposed unless you're standing side-by-side. Adam bursts into poetry when he sees Eve, and the opening chapters of the Bible end with the man and his wife naked and unashamed. It's a very humbling picture of fellowship with God, a sacred responsibility for worship, to reflect God's righteousness in our relationships, and to cultivate the earth, to engage in meaningful and rewarding labor. It's a picture of companionship and intimacy. It's a picture where there is no shame, no guilt, no fear. It's a world that we can almost not even imagine, and yet deep within, etched into the deep memory of every human being, is this echo of Eden. It is in there whether we know it or not. God has made us uniquely in this way. We are called to reflect His righteousness in the earth. We are given the privilege of relationship with one another and the meaningful task in this world. Our work matters, and that work will have its ultimate realization when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We are to live in conscious dependence on the Lord, and it's in this Garden setting that the Lord speaks to us as our heavenly Father. He tells us our responsibility, and He also gives us a warning. That warning is to obey Him. God gives our first ancestors a command in the Garden, and that command is to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that is in the center of the Garden, for the day that we eat of it, we will surely die.

As we go through our series this fall, C for Creation, the icon for creation is an icon of two trees. There are two trees in the middle of the Garden. One of them is a tree of life; the other is a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is not the case that God is against knowing. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil functions in the Garden of Eden to teach us what moral goodness really is. Moral goodness is not an abstract idea. Moral goodness according to the Bible is obedience to the will of God. You see, if you want to be good, according to the Bible, you obey your heavenly Father. Evil, according to the Bible, is disobedience to God. As we will see in detail more next week, our first ancestors do not obey, and this has tragic effects on all of us.

But we must begin where the Bible begins, and that is this ideal, beautiful picture. It's a high picture of who you are, who I am. It is a calling to which the Bible will return again and again and show us how it is carried out. We also heard Psalm 8 read this morning. Psalm 8 is a Psalm of David in which he reflects on who we are and why we're here. In Psalm 8, David bursts into praise and worship fulfilling this creational design. He begins in Psalm 8:1:

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

David meditates on the greatness of God and how He has displayed His power in the heavens, displayed His glory. It's there for all to see, and yet within creation, humanity has the responsibility and privilege of actually voicing that praise. In Psalm 8:2, we read:

*“Out of the mouth of babies and infants, You have established strength because of Your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.”*

It's our task, it's our responsibility, it's our gift, it's our privilege to praise God and to use that gift of speech to respond to the works of our heavenly Father and say, “You are great, You are glorious. I love what You have made in all the works of creation, in the works of humanity made in His image and likeness.” Praise has power in the Psalm to silence the avenger.

Last week, I met an African-American pastor, and he was disciplined in his praising of God, every morning at 5:30 AM. He would gather his family, and I was talking with one of his daughters, and she said, “Yeah, my dad taught us how to start the day. The days started by praising God, I mean really praising God. We would gather, and it was early, and it was not static praise. It was not quiet praise. We moved our bodies. We sang hymns. My father used to say, ‘You don't praise God when you feel Him; you feel Him when you praise Him.’” Hallelujah! You don't praise God when you feel Him. How pitifully subjective is that! You feel Him when you praise Him. Sometimes, just as Psalm 103 says: “Bless the Lord, oh my soul.” Sometimes you have to speak to yourself and say: “Soul, wake up. I have 10,000 reasons right now to praise God. Wake up.” When we praise God in Psalm 8, it silences the adversary. David looks up at the heavens, and this is pre-Hubble telescope, but it's also pre-excess ambient light, so you can still see a pretty spectacular night sky. David says in Psalm 8:3:

*“When I look at your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place,”*

It's pretty awesome, and I see the greatness of what You've made, and I rightly feel kind of small, and it's tempting to say, as David did in Psalm 8:4-5:

*“What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.”*



We are uniquely made in His image. David recognizes from Genesis 1 and 2 that humanity, we are crowned with the glory of God, with a unique honor and dignity. Don't underestimate it, and in Psalm 8:6, he says:

*"You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas."*

We have been given dominion, responsibility. God has set us over the work of His hands. He has placed us with a holy and sacred responsibility, and if He has put us in a position of responsibility, then He has also given us gifts and ability to carry that out. In Psalm 8:9, the Psalmist concludes:

*"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!"*

This morning *C is for Creation*. God is our Creator, and we are made in His image and likeness. The Bible does not tell us all the secrets of the universe. Imagine if God started Genesis 1 with a detailed description of the human genome. How many of us would make it through the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? It would be too big of a book; it would be too much information. God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us what we need to know, and what we need to know was that He is the Creator. We need to know that the creation is good. We need to know that we are made body and soul in His image and His likeness, that we are different from anything else in all creation. Who am I? We need to hear God's Word teach us that we are uniquely made in the image and likeness of God. Nothing else in all creation is described in this way. It means that we have a very real responsibility to the life all around us. Why am I here? We are to reveal God in our actions. We are like mirrors to reflect God's character in the lives around us. We are mirrors back to God, to reflect back to Him His greatness and power and worth. We are mirrors of God's creative power to cultivate and steward over the earth. We have a real responsibility, and this responsibility is both to the earth and all that is in it in general, but it also has this specificity. It is overwhelming to think that we are responsible for everything that happens. The image of being placed in the Garden gives us a scope and scale. I don't know if you have noticed that you're not the only one here, but we are responsible for the place where God puts us. We are responsible for the people that God puts around us. We are responsible to do the work that He gives to us, meaningful work that will contribute in the end to the earth's being filled with image bearers to praise Him.

The Bible has a very high view of humanity. Who are you? You are made in the image and likeness of God. Why are you here? You are here to reflect God and to represent Him. You do that back to God, vertically; across, to the people nearby you—to a brother or sister, a child, a coworker, a neighbor; and you are to represent God and reflect Him to the earth on which you

walk—responsible to cultivate it, develop it, steward wisely over it, and we come back around at the end to bring the fruit of our labor back to God in worship. This is His design. It's His intention, and His intention will be realized, and the Bible takes us on a long journey to what threatens the fulfillment of that and how God overcomes that in the end. Let's pray.

O Lord, we thank You that You are our Creator. Lord, we thank You that You have designed us with infinite wisdom. We thank You, Father, for the very high view of us that You have. We ask for Your forgiveness, Lord, where we have thought too little of ourselves and where we have abdicated our responsibility. We ask Your forgiveness, Lord, where we have exploited the resources near at hand. Lord, we pray that You would take us and that You would renew in us a fresh resolve to embrace our calling, that we would understand our distinctiveness. Lord, we pray that You would renew the exercise of our gifts. Lord, help us to use all that we are, our capacity to sing, our capacity to speak, our capacity to think, our capacity to make decisions, our capacity to cultivate, science, art, technology for the glory of God.

Would you stand with me and present yourself anew as made in the image and likeness of God? I want to invite you now just to put your hands out and say in your heart, "O Lord, O Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth. Lord, You have established praise and you desire it from my lips. Lord, when I look at the works of Your hands, I am in awe that You care so much for me. Would You help me, Lord, to reflect Your care of me as I care for the lives around me? Lord, You have given me glory and honor, and Lord, I want offer back to You all the gifts and talents that You placed within me to reflect You in this world." Lord, our prayer together is that You take all that we are, all that we have, and that You would bring it about that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth! Hallelujah!

Amen.