



## **Lesson 2 – You’re in Charge**

### **Mankind and the Dominion Mandate**

“Alright, while I’m gone you are in charge.” Perhaps as a kid you heard that phrase and felt a slight swelling of pride that you got to tell your siblings what to do. As you grew older it’s likely that “you’re in charge” become a more serious matter. Being in charge of something means responsibility, work, and often sacrifice. Children enjoy being in charge because they don’t understand what that really means. Adults often avoid being in charge precisely because they do. In Genesis we read of God creating a beautiful planet and then putting it under the direction and care of humanity. After God created man, He looked at him and said, “You’re in charge.”

We looked last time at the truth that we are made in God’s image, and we hinted at the end that we are made in God’s image for a reason. To truly understand who we are we must understand the purpose behind our creation. Genesis 1:26 teaches us about the nature of man – he is made in God’s image. Genesis 1:27-28 teaches us about the function of man – he was created to have dominion. So, what does it mean that we are to rule this planet on God’s behalf?

***What do you think it means that man has dominion over the earth?***

People often think of the dominion mandate as meaning that God made this whole world for us. While that’s true to an extent, God ultimately made everything for Himself (Colossians 1:16), and then put us in charge of taking care of His creation.

***Why is it important that we realize everything was ultimately created for God?***

***How will this impact our thinking about taking care of the planet?***

As we examine this lesson, we will study two passages that should shape the way we think about the dominion mandate. Genesis 1-2 will give us the blueprint for our dominion over creation. As we study these two chapters, we will get a better idea of what the dominion mandate looks like. Psalm 8 is a reflection on the dominion mandate by David that will help us think rightly about the dominion mandate today. Finally, we will take some time to apply these truths directly to the work we have

### **God Puts Humanity in Charge (Genesis 1-2)**

God created a world (Genesis 1) and within that world he created a beautiful garden (Genesis 2) and put man in charge of everything (Genesis 1:27). In describing what role man was supposed to have, Genesis

uses 4 verbs: “conquer” and “rule” (KJV “subdue” and “have dominion;” Genesis 1:28), as well as “work” and “protect” (KJV “dress” and “keep;” Genesis 2:15). We will look at each of these verbs to give us a broad picture of what it is God expects humans to do on this planet.

### **Conquer (“Subdue” Genesis 1:28)**

The first word that describes our role in God’s creation is an interesting one. We are told to subdue, or to conquer, the creation. This Hebrew word (*kabash*) is one often used in military contexts where one group conquers another (Numbers 23:21-22, 29; Joshua 18:1; 2 Samuel 8:11). The picture here painted is humanity overcoming the obstacles and resistance of creation. Even before the fall, man was required to expend real energy to take control of the world he was in.

***Why do you think God would tell us that we are to “conquer” or “subdue” the creation? What does this imply about our task?***

Of course, we shouldn’t take this as a license to destroy or abuse the earth. We should imagine that our task of ruling God’s creation will require us to take control, but we should be careful that in so doing we remind ourselves that the world is ultimately made by God for His glory.

***How can people be careless with and disregard the creation in a way that dishonors God?***

### **Rule (“Have Dominion” Genesis 1:28)**

This the general word for “rule over” (*radah*) from which we get the dominion mandate. It means to exert authority over someone or something (1 Kings 4:22-24; Nehemiah 9:28; Psalm 110:2). For Adam and Eve this rule was specifically over the many different kinds of animals, but the principle goes beyond that. God wants us to take care of the world we were put in. While Scripture clearly teaches that God remains sovereign over His creation (Daniel 4:35; Job 38-41; Matthew 5:45), in a very real sense He has put man in charge underneath Him. Like a Father training His children to be responsible, God has delegated. He didn’t need to. He was perfectly capable of taking care of everything Himself. But God chose to partner with man and allow man to rule the world on His behalf.

***Why do you think God chose to partner with humanity rather than simply ruling by Himself?***

This is a somewhat terrifying notion. God didn’t just give us a car, or a house, or a boat and then say, “You’re in charge.” He put us on this planet and said, “You’re in charge.” As we will see below as we consider David’s meditation on this truth in Psalm 8, this shouldn’t make us proud but should rather humble us!

### **Work (“Dress” Genesis 2:15)**

We might hear the common description of Eden as a paradise and wrongly think that Adam was essentially enjoying a long vacation. When God put Adam in the garden, it wasn’t so he could lounge on a beach chair sipping smoothies, there was work to do! The KJV here translates a very common Hebrew word for “work”

more specifically as “dress.” This “dressing” is an old word that describes gardening work. Modern translations follow the KJV by describing this general command here as “cultivating” (NASB, LEB), “tending” (NKJV, NLT), or “tilling” (RSV, NRSV). In other words, Adam was given work to do, and this work was to take care of the garden!

***Why do we often think of paradise as meaning there is no work to do?***

***How can imagining Adam and Eve working hard in the garden of Eden shift the way we tend to think about work?***

Believers today are called to bring order to God’s world by working. In an agrarian culture, this meant tilling, cultivating, harvesting, milling, and similar activities. In the modern world, this means producing, developing, writing, organizing, fixing, thinking, and many, many more such activities. God put us on this earth to create and build. We live in a highly complex world, and it is often to lose sight of how my little job contributes to the big picture of humanity. But whatever my task, when I go to work I am doing my part to rule over and bring order, structure, and beauty to God’s creation.

### **Protect (“Keep” Genesis 2:15)**

The final verb we have that describes Adam’s role is to “keep” the garden, or we could say to guard or protect it.<sup>1</sup> God intended for man to closely guard over the garden and protect it.

***What do you think man needed to protect the garden from?***

Man is supposed to build, but man is also supposed to protect. There are forces that would love to destroy what God is doing. God has given man the job of making sure that evil does not upset the progress that is being made in subduing and ruling over the earth.

***What does it look like today for people to protect or guard what God has given them?***

### **David Ponders Humanity’s Role (Psalm 8)**

Man’s delegated rule over God’s creation was seriously damaged by the fall (more on this next week), but like the image of God it wasn’t entirely lost when man rebelled. In Psalm 8, David marvels at the fact that God has given man authority over His creation. This Psalm gives us important insight into how we should think about the dominion mandate today.

***Read Psalm 8. What connections do you see with Genesis 1?***

***What is the main point that David is getting at in this Psalm?***

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<sup>1</sup> The word for “keep” here is the Old English word which meant to protect, rather than the modern way we use to the word to mean “don’t give something up.” The Hebrew word is *shamar* and often means to guard or protect (Genesis 28:20; Exodus 22:7, 10; 23:20; 2 Kings 11:6-7). In fact, in an ironic twist, because man does not protect the garden from evil, man will be expelled and the garden will be protected from man (Genesis 3:24).

### **God has honored man by giving him dominion over the world (Psalm 8:3-8).**

The pagans around Israel believed that the gods made humanity because they didn't want to work. Much as we are building more and more robots to do the boring, mundane tasks we don't want to (i.e., dishwashers, robot vacuums, laundry machines), the gods of the ancient near east created people because they were tired of making food. So they made men to toil the ground and raise crops and animals and then feed them sacrifices. The Bible tells a radically different story. God made man and put him in charge of the creation to rule it on God's behalf. Sacrifices were a gift of gratitude to a very gracious God, not to fulfill some need God had. The same activities – farming and animal husbandry – looked radically different depending on your perspective.

***What is the world's view of work? How does it differ from the Bible's?***

***How can having the right perspective on God's purpose for us today transform the jobs we have?***

Such an understanding of our role does not lead to arrogance on the part of David, but rather humble gratitude. David simply can't believe that God would take something as small as man and put him in charge over all the creation. Realizing the high task that we have been given should cause us to be humble and depend on God's wisdom and strength to accomplish the task He has given us.

### **God has honored Himself by giving man dominion over the world (Psalm 8:1-2, 9).**

The truth that we are to rule over God's creation could easily lead to pride and arrogance if misunderstood. But David is doing more than just reveling in the fact that man is in charge. He is pointing out that our rule is designed to turn the attention, not to ourselves, but ultimately to God. The Psalm begins and ends on a note of praise. Ultimately, man's rule of creation is about bringing God glory.

***How does our dominion over the earth bring God glory?***

## **The Dominion Mandate and You**

### **A God-Honoring Profession**

Perhaps you've heard the term "Protestant work ethic" before. Ever wondered why it is a Protestant work ethic and not a Catholic work ethic? The distinction can be traced back to a radical shift in the thinking of Martin Luther. Luther questioned and ultimately rejected the Catholic distinction between "secular" and "sacred." Catholics at the time believed that those who served the church had a spiritual, noble calling, while those who had other work held a lesser position. Luther argued instead that everyone's work was sacred; everyone was serving God in some way. The nobleman, artisan, and farmer were servants of God just as the priest, pope, or bishop. In fact, the word vocation means "calling." Whereas the Catholics argued that the clergy had a calling, the Protestants argued that everyone does.

The dominion mandate reinforces this important observation. Everyone has important work to do, not just the pastors and missionaries. Every legitimate job (sorry embezzlers and drug cartels) in some way brings order to God's world, creates beauty, and allows greater use of God's creation. Your job might be

filing paperwork or putting the same screw in a factory a million times a day or delivering packages for Amazon, but such work is part helping to advance man's (hopefully) wise stewardship of the planet and its resources. You can worship God Monday through Friday while you work your job by partaking in the global human project to rule over the world, and for that matter you can worship God on Saturday by doing lawn projects!

***All jokes aside, are there some jobs that a Christian shouldn't take? How can that be decided?***

***What about people who hate their job, or who feel like their job is meaningless?***

### **A God-Intended Partnership**

This task is ultimately one that will require the teamwork of men and women. When God created woman, the Bible describes her as “an help[er] meet [fitting] for him” (Genesis 2:18). In other words, God put man in charge of creation and knew he would need help! The solution was to create a woman who “corresponded”<sup>2</sup> to him and could fill in his deficiencies. This essential helping role of women is seen perhaps most clearly in the powerful testimony to a diligent wife who enables her husband to succeed in Proverbs 31.

***Skim Proverbs 31:10ff. What kinds of activities does the woman here described do?***

***What are other ways that men and women team up to accomplish God's purpose in the world?***

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<sup>2</sup> The word for “meet” is the Hebrew preposition *neged* which means “opposite” or “counterpart.” In other words, woman was designed to be a helper that corresponded to man.