

## AMAZING! GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

Second in a series of stewardship emphasis sermons by Dr. Rick Perrin from Genesis 1:24-31 and 2:4-9

*"And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"* Genesis 1:28

Our attention this past week fastened on the horrible slaughter of thirty-two people on the campus of Virginia Tech. Every one of us whose children are in college, or have been in college, or will graduate from high school in a few weeks and go to college, has thought, "What if it were my child who was gunned down?" We've heard stories from the students who survived. We've read about the heroic seventy-six year old professor who lived through Nazi death camps and Communist oppression in Romania and came to America to find peace, but sacrificed his life to save his students. We've listened to blame-mongers, suffered politicians' self-interested hypocrisy, and wondered to ourselves how our world can be breaking down before our eyes. "This didn't used to happen," we've whispered to one another when our anxiety has seeped over the edge.

To understand what happened in Blacksburg, Virginia, we must turn to a fundamental principle that God gives us in his word. If you can get a hold of this one, it will not only explain what went on last week, but it will also point you with hope and optimism toward what you can do about it. This principle which we will look at this morning is one of the first we find in the Bible, yet amazingly most Christians have never given it much thought. Here's the principle: God works through people. Many of you are looking at me with blank expressions on your faces, like I've lost my mind. "Of course God works through people," you're thinking. "Everybody knows that. And what does it have to do with a deranged mass murderer?" Well, let's see. Please turn with me to Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

First of all, we'll make three brief, but major observations about God and the creation. The first observation is a very obvious one: **God didn't need any help when he created the world.** Genesis Chapter 2 provides a theological interpretation of the creation. The last phrase of verse 4 says, "*The Lord God made earth and heaven.*" Verse 7 says, "*God formed man of dust from the ground,*" which simply means that our bodies are composed of the same chemicals and elements from which the Earth is made. Verse 8 says, "*God planted a garden toward the east.*" And in verse 9 it says that "*out of the ground God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.*" God did all this by himself. All three of Barb's and my sons are home this weekend. There was a time before they were born, and then while they were small, that I did all the outside maintenance at our house. I cut the grass. I dug holes for the flowers that Barb wanted to plant. I trimmed the bushes. I painted the house. I even put a new roof on our house. I did it myself. But the day came when I began to give some of those tasks over to them. They learned to cut the grass. During the summers they were in college they became professionals, working for a landscaping company. They've continued to help out as the years have passed. But now they think that I'm really old and that I can't do it like I did before. They worry about me working too hard. Ah, but

this past week before they came I did it all myself—cut, edged, trimmed--and when they arrived the house was be looking good, if I may say so myself! But then they presented me with an early Father's Day gift: a self-propelled lawn mower! Well, God created the world. He could have done the caretaking himself if he'd wanted.

Observation number two: **Man is a special creation.** Notice chapter 1, verse 25. It says that God created the beasts after their kind. He created the cattle after their kind. He created the creeping things—reptiles—after their kind. But verse 26 says he made man after his own image. There are two aspects to this idea of being made in the image of God. The first is that God created human beings with a moral dimension to our character. What we do matters. It is either morally right or morally wrong. The animals just do what animals do. They don't have consciences. They have no morality. But human behavior has significance. What the shooter at Virginia Tech did was wrong. What the heroic professor did was right. There's a difference.

The second part of being created in the image of God is that God created us with a soul. A man recognized me in a restaurant last week. He said, "I have a question. Do animals go to heaven?" He said, "My dog just died, and I'm having trouble coping with it." He's sent me an e-mail so I can respond in writing. I could have saved him the trouble. Barb and I just put down our 11 year old dog, so I could sympathize with him. But there is no question: Mags did not go to heaven. We had a dog once that went to hell. I'm sure of that. But never heaven. Why? Because animals don't have souls. Angels have souls. They are spiritual beings. They don't have bodies. Dogs have bodies, but not souls or spirits. However God created men and women with both bodies and souls. We are a higher creation than either angels or animals. Here is something important to realize. You can kill your body. You cannot kill your soul. The shooter at Virginia Tech did not escape justice for his deeds. The moment he took his own life, he fell into the hands of God, and God will deal with him. So humans are a special creation.

Observation number 3: **God gave man a task to carry out.** Two tasks, actually. First, God commanded us in verse 28, "*Multiply, and fill the earth.*" This command to reproduce ourselves is ultimately a critical element to fulfilling the second task. The second task is also in verse 28. God said, "*Fill the earth and subdue it.*" In other words, "Make improvements to the creation." Then he added, "Rule over the animals." So God elevated us to the office of ruler and governor of the creation. In that, we also are like God. The lion may be the king of the jungle, but he doesn't rule. The angels may possess powers that we don't, but their assigned task is servanthood., They don't rule. That's our job. God made a beautiful world. He didn't need any help to do it. He doesn't require any help in running it. And yet, in a very gracious act, he turned the management of the world over to you and me. He made us his stewards. We are sub-creators and managers of God's creation. That's the task God made us to carry out.

How do we apply what we've observed? There are three applications that affect how you and I ought to live. The first application is, **we can understand sin and evil in the world.** You know the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3. God assigned them as the first human beings, to rule the earth for him. What an opportunity they had!

They could work in the pristine world God had given them and make it even more beautiful than it was, without the inconvenience of weeds or fireants! Instead, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and in effect handed control of the world over to the devil. Jesus called Satan, “the ruler of this world.” (John 12:31) Ruler is not Satan’s rightful role. It is a position he stole and usurped. When Adam and Eve surrendered the creation to the devil, they broke the world, and we’ve had to live with the mess ever since.

The winter I was about 11 years old there was a pot luck supper at our church. My mother had made a casserole, and I said, “I’ll carry it in, Mom.” She could have done it. She entrusted it to me. And I slipped on the ice and dropped the casserole. Not only did the glass bowl shatter, but food splattered everywhere. For some reason my parents did not assign me the task of helping to clean the mess up. And though my mother forgave me, didn’t even scold me, I still feel sorry what I did to this day. Here’s the point. Adam and Eve dropped the world, and it shattered. Their descendants keep dropping it so that the world keeps breaking. We call this sin. Satan would never be able to wreak evil in the world if Adam and Eve had not handed the world over to him. And he could not do evil today if he did not have human beings willing to do what he bids. There would never have been a massacre at Virginia Tech unless some human being offered himself to do the devil’s work. Do you see the significance of our own sin? When we sin we carry out the designs of the devil.

Application two: **If the world has any beauty or sees any improvement, it is we as God’s people who must do it.** God built into our nature the need to create and rule and make beauty. It’s just that now it’s harder than it was at the beginning. Many of you will spend hours this Spring cultivating your little patch of the planet. You’ll spread pinestraw and mulch. You’ll plant flowers and vegetables. I chatted with one of our members who keeps trying to grow rhubarb each year. It’s a hopeless effort here in the South, but he told me, “I bought four rhubarb plants.” He manages about a pie a year for all his labor. But it goes far beyond that. A couple from our church is building a house this Spring--constructing it themselves! Johnny Johnson builds sewers. For Johnny laying sewers is an art form because the infrastructure he creates ensures that the new house my friends are building won’t have a little wooden shack out back with a half moon cut in the door. Building cities is part of the task God has assigned us as human beings. Others run businesses that provide jobs so people may live in greater comfort and prosperity. Or teach children. Still others make music or create art. In still another dimension of our stewardship, some of us do the work of government. Some protect the nation and enforce laws so the wicked are punished and evil-doers are prevented from tearing down what has been built up. They encourage and support what is good and righteous. This is the expression of our stewardship.

But there is a third application, and this is what I’ve been aiming at from the beginning. Application three: **God entrusted us as followers of Christ with the task of saving the world.** Remember our first observation, that God is the one who created the world and the people in it, and didn’t need our help. It’s the same with regard to saving the world. Ultimately it is God who does it. God became a man and came to the world in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died to pay for sin so that he might save the

souls of those who place their faith in him. He rose from the dead to save their bodies. All of this is God's work. This is not something we can do or even help with in the work of salvation. In addition, when Jesus comes again to this world, he will rescue it from its broken state and totally restore it to its original condition, and there is nothing we can do to help with that. However, God extends to us by his gracious act, the privilege of participating with him in the work of saving the world.

How do we do that? Jesus said to his apostles and to us, "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) How do we carry out the work of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples? It requires that we make use of the resources God has given us--time, energy, human ability, and of course, money. But let me give you a couple of examples. Bruce and Kathy are missionaries from Cornerstone in a part of the world that does not have the Bible in their own language. Bruce and Kathy are skilled linguists and have translated the gospel into that uncharted tongue. People are now reading about Jesus and turning to him in a country where until Bruce and Kathy went there a few years ago there were zero Christian believers. And then there was Ellis Twaddle. When we decided that God wanted us to begin our SOAR ministry to reach the non-or minimally-churched people in our culture, we wondered how we were going to turn raw land into playing fields. Along came Ellis Twaddle, who died a week and a half ago. Ellis didn't possess much in the way of money. He did operate a grading business. He had big earth moving machines. He said to one of our pastors, "It's your job to show me the beauty of God. It's my job to show you the God's beauty in the world." He turned his equipment and skill to the work of grading the SOAR fields. Many children and their parents have come to Christ because of Ellis Twaddle's work. The work of saving the world always requires money in some way or other. There is always a cost to be paid in order for the work to go forward. And that's where most of us come in. Whether it's missions to reach the world or building buildings or sports fields, or teaching Sunday School classes or leading a Bible Study, resources are necessary to "put legs" on the gospel. That's stewardship.

When it comes to the resources God has placed in our hands, we have three options. Here's the first option: In Manhattan the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen has a building that houses the John M. Mossman Lock Collection. They have 475 bank vault locks on display, dating back a couple hundred years. Those locks were designed by companies like the Yale Lock Company to thwart thieves who were determined to steal the money deposited in the bank. The first option you and I have with regard to our resources is that we can, as it were, borrow one of those locks from the Mossman Collection, and lock our resources away in a safe place, never to be used. Here's the second option: In Los Vegas workers have been stripping down the now closed Sands Casino. As they removed the slot machines, guess what they found. Over \$17,000 worth of loose change. They even found a \$100 bill! It was all money that had been lost or wasted by people playing the slots, money that never even provided a moment's fleeting pleasure. It was just lost. So the second option is that you can waste or lose the resources God has given you. But there's a third option. As faithful stewards, you and I can recognize the resources God has given us, pull them out and use them in the work of saving the world. You can use your resources to send missionaries, or supply

the work of the church, or provide facilities that enable God's work to go on. You can use them to encourage and help suffering people. Most of all, you can invest in the work of bringing men and women, boys and girls to Jesus. If you do that, your investment will never go unused or be lost. It will reap dividends that last forever.

God works through people. He doesn't have to, but that's the way he's chosen to do it. If we do not allow God to work through us as we use the resources he has put in our hands, there is some of that work God would do through us that will never be done. The choice is ours. God works through people. The question is, will he work through you and me?

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