

## “God’s First Command” 06.03.12

**Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28**

**Video: “Environment” [4:27] by Highway Media**

**New Summer Sermon Series.** A series that’s not a series. Calling it Summer Singles. Why? Three reasons. #1 - Each sermon is separate from all the others. Single. If you miss one you don’t miss the whole thing. #2 Each talk will have one single big idea. You walk away on Sunday and someone asks on Monday what we talked about, you can tell them. #3 It’s summer. Baseball season. The single is the most important hit. Sure, home runs get all the glory, but it’s usually the team that can consistently hit the singles that win the game. We are going to talk about important “singles” that can help you win in your Christian faith.

**Today - God’s 1st Command.** When we think back to Genesis and we think of the story of Adam and Eve, don’t we usually think about God’s command about NOT eating the fruit from the Tree of Eternal Life? However God’s 1st command was not a command of restriction. Just the opposite! The command is infinite in its scope. Eugene Petersen, when he translated Gen. 1:28, put it this way: **“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take Charge!” Here’s today’s single, BIG idea!**

**Today’s Single: God commands me to RULE the Earth.**

The key word is found right in the middle of Genesis 1:28... to rule.

**“Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:28b NIV**

We learn something about what’s involved here but looking at different English translations of this word, “rule.” The ESV “**have dominion over**,” the idea of a king’s dominion. In fact the NLT “**reign over**.” We often think of a king who can do anything he pleases. But the best concept of kingship was someone who cared for his kingdom, hence the MSG “**take responsibility for**.” **To help us best understand we need to get rid of the worst meaning some people have...**

**To RULE the Earth does not mean to EXPLOIT the Earth.**

Notice the connection between “taking charge” and “being responsible.”

**“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for ... the face of Earth.” Genesis 1:28 MSG**

There’s a caretaker status involved in this story. We cannot separate out God’s first command from everything else that has come before. God creates everything else that is and then lastly creates Man. We learn that Man is different than all the all the other creatures in two respects. And both of these differences should play a big role in how we care for the world around us.

*Pay attention here because this is why environmentalism matters and also why so many people not connected with Christianity inherently know that protecting the environment is important but struggle to explain why (as in the video we just watched together.) We cannot separate our command to rule responsibly from the ONE who gave the command!*

## How To Rule #1: WITH THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MIND

When God came to his final act of creation - human beings - we see something unique and special. He created us *in His own image*.

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27 NLT

This doesn't mean we look like God or that He looks like us. It means there is something special in our creation that gives us the ability to think like and act like God. While we often don't think about the connection, there's a reason why verse 28 to rule over the other creatures and verse 27 that we are created in God's own image are linked. When it comes to the reign of mankind over the Earth, our responsibility is to carry the image of God in our rule. Remember the WWJD bracelets? When it comes to the care of the Earth and all its creatures, that should be our standard. What would God do?

You might ask, how could we possibly know? How can we balance our own needs as creatures against the needs of those creatures under our rule. That brings us to the the second difference between us and the rest of God's creatures and the second “how to.” And this is subtle. You may have missed it. To see this I need to take you to verse 22 we we see something very similar to verse 28.

“And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply...” Genesis 1:22 ESV

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply...”  
Genesis 1:28 ESV

Here for the first time we see the Holy, All-Powerful, Creator-Of-All-That-Is communicating directly to one of His creations. One of the great ways that *Man is like God* is that Man can communicate, can understand. **This leads us to our second “How To...”**

## How To Rule #2: BY COMMUNICATING WITH GOD

Of course we have a word for that... it's called prayer. When we think of prayer we usually think of something holy and something higher. We think of seeking direction and forgiveness and connection with the Almighty. Exactly! This is how we should think of environmentalism! Not as a cause. Not as something we should do because it's politically correct or not. But because it's holy. It's about God and His creation and His commandment to us. He would not give us such a high calling without A) the power to do it and B) the means of understanding what He has in mind.

One of the greatest fallacies of our worship experience is that we worship in church by our singing or listening to a good sermon or reading the Bible. The truth is that we worship God best when we obey Him. When we take His commands seriously.

Here's a question you may want to *communicate with God about* this week. Do I take this commandment to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, to govern it, to reign responsibly over God's creation as seriously as I do his other commands? Examples - to not steal, or covet, or to take the Lord's name in vain, or to keep the Sabbath holy. Is God's 1st command the 1st one I forget?

So let's get practical. My first command is to rule responsibly. I do this in God's image and with prayer. God may lead you in specific directions. Here's some first steps that came to my mind this week in sermon prep:

#### 4 Practical First Steps...

**#1: Gain Greater Appreciation For All Life**. Recognize that every creature on this good Earth has been given life by God. Don't snuff it out without good cause. I'm not suggesting anyone become a Vegetarian, but I am suggesting you should examine seriously how God directs you. Perhaps it's not a matter of taking life or not but the humane way of raising food. Does the life of another creature have a purpose beyond simply being food? Explore. Read. Think. Ask. Pray. Go beyond convenience to fulfill your responsibility to reign well.

**#2: Beautify The World Beyond My Boundaries**. Hopefully we do a pretty good job of keeping our own properties in good shape. (If not, start there!) What happens to the world beyond my own property? Am I doing all that I can do to care for the Earth? How do I handle my trash? Do I think about the packaging that I use? Is everything out of sight, then out of mind? Or do I think about the environmental footprint I leave behind because of my own life? In Boys Scouts we learned to care for our camps by "packing it out." Let's take the next step with the rest of our lives.

**#3: Discover Community with Step #2**. The job of caring for Planet Earth is bigger than any one person. However it's not bigger than the community of Christ-followers. Christians working together working with God's direction and power can accomplish great things together! What project might you be able to take on that would combine your God community with your God vision? Maybe keeping a particular section of highway picked up. Or lobbying for more recycling options. Or helping the local garden club plant flowers.

**#4: Appreciate the Beauty of God's Creation**. The last practical first step may be just to get outside of the city. Get away from the roads and the cars. Go for a hike. Go for a canoe ride. Go where it's so quiet you can hear the birds singing. Go where there are no lights on the land so you can see and appreciate the night lights God has hung in the sky. Sit quietly and invisibly and watch a squirrel scamper. Smell the air as God intended it to be.

Be reminded that this Earth is a gift. *We have a responsibility to rule it responsibly.* Not just exploiting the Earth for our own immediate and selfish desires. But as a king would rule over the Earth, as representing God Himself! There have been countless generations of people who have enjoyed Planet Earth before us. Let us take God's first commandment seriously so that there may be countless generations of our children who might enjoy Planet Earth after us as well.

**Let's pray.**