

The Goodness of Givenness

Male and Female He Created Them (Genesis 1:27)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on April 24, 2022

What Is This Series All About?

- ❖ This morning I have the privilege of kicking off a new mini-series called The Goodness of Givenness. If you've been here long enough, you know that our normal practice is to preach through books of the Bible. We want to give you a steady diet of expository sermons – where the point of the sermon is drawn from the point of the passage.
 - But every so often, we go through a short thematic series that allows us to speak into particular issues from a biblical worldview. We still want to hear from Scripture, but the format is different. We won't be walking through a singular text. Rather, we'll be mining the riches of Scripture and bringing it to bear on a particular topic.

- ❖ So what is this series on The Goodness of Givenness all about? **Essentially, it's aimed at challenging the widespread assumption that we are masters of our own fate.** That we have the ability (or more like the responsibility) to define our own reality and forge our own identity in this world. That's an idea largely assumed by most people today.
 - **It's where we see ourselves as master artists.** Born with a blank canvas. And as we get older, it's our responsibility to create a unique identity for ourselves. That, we're told, is a huge part of what life is all about. It's a journey of self-discovery.

- ❖ **The dominant cultural narrative of our day teaches that true happiness comes from discovering your true self.** From looking within and finding the real you. But that's only half the battle. The world says you'll be perpetually unhappy if you repress the real you. **So you'll need the courage to give expression to that new identity of yours.**
 - Now just as those master artists innovated new art movements by pushing boundaries and breaking artistic norms, we're encouraged to push cultural boundaries and to break societal norms in our journey for authenticity. **There may be a cost to pay, but you'll be celebrated for being brave enough to express the real you.**

- ❖ I assume much of this sounds familiar. You hear it in so many of the songs, shows, and stories that influence our culture. But what you probably don't hear is how exhausting all of this is. **The reality is that the work of creation is exhausting.** The responsibility to create something from scratch – to make something original – is emotionally draining.
 - I think about having to write sermons from scratch. I think about Thursday mornings where I'm usually in my office staring at a blank screen. It's a stressful process. It's exhausting. I'm sure many of you can relate. Whether you've tried to write a term paper from scratch; pen a song from scratch; draw a sketch from scratch – you know just how hard and emotionally draining that task can be.

- ❖ **I'd argue that much of the hyper-anxiety that marks our late modern age can be attributed to our failed efforts to live up to this onerous task of being a creator.** We're being crushed by the weight of expectations to make an identity for ourselves from scratch.

- ❖ I feel for young people today. **I think much of the anxiety and insecurity they face today can be explained by this cultural messaging they're inundated with.** Think of the immense pressure they're under to create their own identity. They better not mess up. **They better choose wisely out of an infinite array of possible identities.**
 - When I was their age, I thought having to pick which college to attend or what major to choose was high-pressured and stress-inducing. But those choices pale in comparison to the kinds of decisions young people are faced with today.

- ❖ But, Church, this is where we can offer good news. **In contrast to the dominant cultural narrative of our day, the biblical narrative relieves you of the stress of having to define your own identity.** Instead of laying on the pressure to be a master artist who creates something new, the Bible calls us instead to enjoy **the work of an art restorationist.**
 - Are you familiar with the work of a restorationist? You're *not* the original artist. You're *not* working with a blank canvas. Your job is *not* to create something from scratch. **No, it's to restore that which has deteriorated or been defaced.**

- ❖ The point is this – you are *not* a blank canvas. **You are a work of art made by Another.** **Now, sadly, sin has defaced your original design.** So you're in need of restoration. But in that process of restoration, you don't have free reign to come up with something new. You're bound by the original artist's intent and design.
 - Now that might sound too restrictive for you. But it's actually liberating. **It's freeing to know your only task is to restore.** Because now you know there's a given standard to guide you. That's a relief. That's encouraging!

- ❖ Friends, that's the heart behind our series. The goal is to encourage you. Not to condemn you or to ridicule anyone. We're going to address some current issues and challenge some contemporary thinking. But we do so because we believe it will help lift a heavy burden.
 - **There is freedom to be found when we finally confess that we are *not* master artists.** That there is one Master, one original Artist. And our job is to know him and to know how he designed us to live as beings made in his image. Our task is to acknowledge and to appreciate our givenness – the goodness of our givenness.

Why Talk About Gender Identity?

- ❖ Now in this series, we're going to start by applying this principle of the goodness of givenness to the issue of gender identity. **We're going to talk about transgenderism.** Now you might be wondering why. Why are we going there? Isn't that topic too sensitive? Too controversial? Why preach on that from the pulpit?
 - It's a fair question. And to be honest, I wish I didn't have to talk about it. I'd rather not have to address touchy subjects. **But I don't think I'd be a very helpful pastor if I pretended like this wasn't a subject that you're having to process through as a Christian.** The fact is that we can't go a week without reading or hearing about gender identity in the news.

- ❖ **From school board meetings to Supreme Court nomination hearings – everyone is talking about the T in LGBTQ.** Everyone is asking hard questions. Granted, they may not have been considered hard questions ten or twenty years ago. But they sure are now. “What is a woman?” is a question so hard that the newest nominee to the nation's highest court didn't know how to answer. That's all the more reason to engage this issue and ask these questions.
- ❖ Friends, in all likelihood, you will, at some point, personally come to know someone struggling with gender identity. Perhaps you already do. Perhaps that person is you. That's why we need to talk about this. **Because the church ought to be the safest place for persons struggling with gender identity to share.** The church should be the one place where you know you can find a sympathetic ear if you were to share about your struggles between what your internal desires tell you and what external authorities tell you is true.
 - For some, that struggle is manifested in gender confusion. While, for others, it might be manifested in a struggle with greed or gluttony. The outward manifestation might be different, but the inward struggle is the same. **Every Christian knows how hard it is to conform how we feel in our hearts with what the Lord says in his Word.** So Christians, of all people, should be sympathetic and sensitive towards those struggling with their gender identity.
- ❖ **Even if most of us don't experience any confusion over our gender, I'm fairly certain that we all experience some degree of discontentment over our bodies.** That might not have anything to do with your anatomy. But maybe you're dissatisfied with the way your bodies appear; or how it gets tired all the time; or how it's breaking down and failing to respond like it used to. We all feel that way to some degree.
 - **This probably explains why so many are drawn towards virtual reality.** New technologies offer the promise of freeing our minds and imaginations from bodily restraints and limitations. Put on these VR glasses and enter a new reality where you can choose your own avatar. You can exchange your body out for something entirely different or just escape the body altogether.
- ❖ But Christianity offers better news. **The Christian gospel says that that joy and happiness we're after is not found through an exchange or escape from the body but through the redemption (Rom 8:23) and transformation (Phil 3:21) of our mortal bodies.**
 - The gospel calls us to repent of sin – not to reject the body. Jesus told us to deny ourselves. But he meant denying our sinful desires and selfish ambitions – not the way our bodies were made. We have good news – not of escape – but transformation.
 - So Christians don't have to wade into the topic of gender identity with fear and trepidation. Because we have good news! **We can offer the hope of true happiness that's found in discovering how your Creator made you and coming to appreciate the goodness of your givenness.**

What Does the Culture Have to Say About Gender?

- ❖ But before we turn to Scripture, let's try to get a good grasp of what the dominant cultural narrative is saying. What does the culture have to say about gender? There are four particular things it has to say.
- ❖ **First, the culture says that your body is not you.** You have a body, but you are not your body. So your body might communicate one gender, but that's not who you really are. Your body may not necessarily align with your identity.
 - Now that kind of talk sounds very contemporary. But these are very ancient concepts. **The roots go back to ancient Greek teaching from philosophers like Plato.** Platonic thought is dualistic in nature. It presents a sharp dichotomy between the body and soul (or mind). Plato taught that the body is merely a receptacle for the soul. The real you is your soul – not your body.
- ❖ There was an ancient heresy in the early church that tried to wed this kind of Platonic thought with Christianity. It was called Gnosticism. **Gnostic thought was pessimistic towards the body.** It pictured the body as a prison house for the soul and framed salvation in terms of liberation from our body and its physical limitations. It's similar to the anti-materialism of many Eastern religions that are likewise dualistic.
 - This is why the NT authors had to defend the Incarnation – to defend the idea that Jesus came in the flesh. That he took on a human body. Listen to **1 John 4:2-3**. John just warned his readers of false prophets and the need to be discerning. *“²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.”*
 - Gnostic thought has been creeping into the church since the days of the apostles. And sadly it has taken root – not just in secular culture – but in the thinking of many in the church today. **Gnostic heresy is on the ascendancy wherever it's assumed that the real me is my soul/mind and not my body.**
- ❖ **Second, the culture says your gender is determined psychologically.** When a baby is born, we're told you can say, “It's a boy or a girl.” But that's just the sex assigned at birth. That's not the baby's gender. We don't know the gender yet because that's still to be determined.
 - This is founded on the idea that we are born as blank canvases when it comes to identity. **The philosophical groundwork was laid by Enlightenment philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau.** He taught that human nature is intrinsically good until it's corrupted by society. And so to discover your true identity, you need to dig past all the societal norms and expectations and look deep inside to find the real you.
 - **And so when it comes to gender, you get to determine that for yourself.** If you are not your body – if you are fundamentally a soul/mind – then you can ignore what gender your body seems to suggest. The authority of the body is rejected. Its voice is silenced. We're only to pay attention to what gender you feel you are or think you are. Gender is a psychological determination.

- ❖ **Third, the culture says your gender identity is fluid.** Think about it. If gender is not based on physiology but psychology – not on how you are physically constructed but on how you think or feel – then gender can’t be a fixed category since how we think and how we feel are never fixed. They’re susceptible to change. So too is our gender.
 - **This kind of thinking typically results in a rejection of the gender binary – the idea that everyone is born either male or female.** The culture would say that perhaps someone identified as male when he was young, but eventually he transitioned into a she. And now she identifies as female. Or maybe the individual rejects the binary altogether and prefers to identify as gender queer.
 - Now all of that would’ve make no sense to your grandparents and their generation. Perhaps it would’ve made no sense to you ten years ago. But now speaking of gender as a fluid category sounds normal. Why? Because of that philosophical shift I mentioned. Gender fluidity is the result of a worldview that sees psychology – not biology – as determinative of one’s gender identity.

- ❖ We are living in fast-changing times. **So fast that LGBTQ revolutionaries are outpacing one another.** There has always been an unsteady alliance between the LGB and the TQ. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals have taught that sexual orientation is a fixed category. That you’re born attracted to one sex or the other or to both. In other words, they focus on nature over nurture.
 - But transgenderism and queer theory does the opposite. They focus on nurture over nature. They’d say gender is not something you’re born with. It doesn’t matter what you’re born with. You have the freedom to change and determine your own identity.

- ❖ In Carl Trueman’s book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, he gives an example of a long-time lesbian couple where one woman eventually transitioned to become a man. That forced her partner to face an existential dilemma. Was she still a lesbian if she’s now in a committed relationship with a transgender man?
 - Whose self-determined identity wins out in that situation? Or do they both just live their own truth and ignore the contradiction? That’s the most likely outcome. Because, in today’s world, authenticity is the highest virtue. The most important thing is to be true to yourself. That leads to the fourth statement.

- ❖ **Fourth, the culture says that your happiness is found in becoming your true self.** This fundamental assertion is what some have labeled as **expressive individualism**. It’s a way of thinking that is so commonplace nowadays that we often hear it without thinking twice about it. Tim Keller points to the uber-popular Disney song “**Let it Go**” as a perfect encapsulation of expressive individualism.
 - Princess Elsa’s heroic choice is presented as a courageous rejection of the norms and expectations of her parents or her community and a willingness to express her true self no matter the consequences. “It’s time to see what I can do / To test the limits and break through / No right, no wrong, no rules for me / I’m free!”

- ❖ Listen to how Keller analyzes these lyrics. He says that within the framework of expressive individualism, *“Identity is not realized, as in traditional societies, by sublimating (redirecting) our individual desires for the good of our family and people. Instead, we become ourselves only by asserting our individual desires against society, by expressing our feelings and fulfilling our dreams regardless of what anyone says.”*¹
 - That's expressive individualism. Now, look, I'm not anti-Disney. I'll let my daughters watch *Frozen*. But I make sure to watch it with them and to help them to detect and discern the cultural messaging and how it stands up against the truth of Scripture.

What Does Scripture Have to Say About Gender?

- ❖ That's where I want us to turn. We considered four statements from the culture, so let's consider how Scripture would respond. Here are four things Scripture says about gender.
- ❖ **First, Scripture says that your body is you – but not the totality of you.** The biblical doctrine of creation teaches that you don't just have a body – you are a body. We just finished a series through Genesis 1-11 and spent extended time in chapters 1-2, so most of you would be familiar with the creation of Adam. **Recall how God didn't create a human soul first, and then look for an appropriate vessel to put it in.** Quite the opposite. God started with matter. He formed it and shaped it into a body. And then he breathed life (spirit) into it.
 - What does that mean? That means we humans are embodied creatures. **God purposely made us with bodies and said it was very good.** It's so good that the Son of God took on a body himself. And even after his body was beaten, bruised, and buried, he was eager to take it back again in the Resurrection. If the real Jesus was merely his soul, then he had no need for a resurrected body. But Jesus's body is part of Jesus's identity. **His body is a vital part of who he is as the Incarnate, Risen Lord.** The same would be true of us – our bodies are a vital part of who we are.
- ❖ But having said that, it's important to acknowledge that, while your body is you, it's not the totality of you. **You can make a proper distinction between your body and your soul.** The Bible does that. Jesus taught, in **Matthew 10:28**, to not, *“fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*
 - So there is a difference. We know that, when we die, our souls will be separated from our bodies, but that doesn't mean we cease to exist. But that separation just makes us groan inwardly and eagerly await the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). For that great day when we receive our resurrected body – when the last *“trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”* (1 Cor 15:52).
- ❖ Here's the second thing. The culture says your gender is determined psychologically. **But Scripture says your gender is recognized biologically.** I thought it was fascinating that, when that senator asked Judge Ketanji Brown-Jackson if she could answer what a woman is, she said she couldn't because she's not a biologist.

¹ Tim Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, pg 134

- ❖ She didn't say she couldn't answer because she's not a psychologist. She said biologist. Now, granted, she probably didn't mean to affirm a view of gender as biologically recognized. But maybe that's what slipped out – because that's what we all instinctively know to be true.
 - That's certainly what Scripture teaches in **Genesis 1:27**. Listen to it, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” **Notice how maleness and femaleness are grounded biologically and not psychologically.** When it says God created us male and female, he did so by creating male and female bodies. And in the next verse, he commands male and female to enter into a conjugal union and to procreate. To be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God is talking biology not psychology.

- ❖ **Now, granted, being male and female is about more than biology – but not less.** That means there is so much more about what it means to be a man or to be a woman than just what your anatomy says about you – but not less. **There is so much more about you that I can't deduce just by looking at you – but at least your gender is recognizable.**

- ❖ Now some of you may be thinking that that's not always true. Some of you are doctors or nurses who work in delivery rooms, and you're aware of **the rare but real case of being born intersex**. That refers to persons who are born with ambiguous reproductive anatomy, which makes recognizing their gender at birth very difficult.
 - There are DNA tests to look for chromosomal evidence to determine if the baby is biologically male or female. But families with intersex children need our love and compassion – as they face the pain of life in a fallen world and deal with a unique set of questions and decisions to make. **They might turn to medical intervention to help their intersex child to live out the gender the child was born with – but which has been physically unrecognizable in one way or another.**
 - That decision should not be confused with the controversy over medical intervention for children identifying as transgender. **Children who are dealing with gender dysphoria are not in the same category as intersex children.** Those who identify as transgender are not facing ambiguity over their biological sex. And their turn to medical intervention is not trying to clarify an ambiguous biological sex – but rather to obscure an obvious one.

- ❖ **Families with children dealing with gender dysphoria likewise need our love and compassion.** They are dealing with pain, confusion, and grief that most of us cannot fathom. We must not despise them nor abandon them. **We must support them in ways that are consistent with biblical character and convictions.** That means with gentleness and humility. That means being quick to listen and slow to speak.
 - That also means speaking truth in love – that God created us in his own image; in the image of God he created us; male and female he created us. And he said it was good. **Every child conceived is an act of divine creation.** And no matter the effects of a fallen world on a baby in development – every newborn bears the image of God. And is born with a body divinely designed to accord with the gender assigned by God.

- ❖ That leads to the third thing Scripture has to say: **Your gender identity is a given.** The culture says gender is fluid. It can change. And now medical technology grants us the power to reshape our bodies to match our declared gender. It's antiquated to speak of gender being a given. We have the technological ability to change what used to be understood as a given.
 - But let's think about that more carefully. Granted, through medical intervention, we can delay puberty for adolescents or suppress hormones for adults. **But the fact that you have to actively and daily work against your body's natural functions – where it's constantly pushing against you in the opposite direction – that's your body trying to tell you something.**
 - It's what theologians call general revelation. It's what Paul speaks about in Romans 1. It's God communicating to us "*in the things that have been made.*" (Rom 1:20). Which would include our bodies.

- ❖ **The point here is that your gender – your maleness or your femaleness – is not something you determine for yourself.** Because you're not the master artist working with a blank canvas. No, God is the Master Artist, and he gave you a gender from the start. Now maybe it's disordered. Perhaps it doesn't look right or feel right. That's where you're called to do the hard work of a restorationist. To restore the maleness or femaleness you were given when God was knitting you together in your mother's womb (Ps 139:13).

- ❖ Now here's where we should be careful. **When we speak of restoring maleness or femaleness, let's be careful not to uncritically accept all the typical gender stereotypes.** We should be quick to affirm – not only the differences between men and women – but also that there are differences between men and men and between women and women.
 - Not all men like sports. And not all women enjoy shopping. So perhaps some of the gender confusion that some people deal with could be helped by distinguishing gender stereotypes from gender identity.
 - Now I'm in no way suggesting that all cases of gender dysphoria can be resolved that simply. But I still think it's a valid point to make. So what if your little boy likes to play with his sister's dolls. Or your little girl loves watching football or playing it with her older brothers. Don't jump to any conclusions. **My point is that you don't have to embrace traditional gender stereotypes as you hold firm to a biblical gender binary.**

- ❖ Here is the fourth thing Scripture has to say. Remember, the culture says your happiness is found in becoming your true self. **But Scripture says your happiness is found in becoming a new creation.**
 - The most the world can offer is affirmation. The world can affirm whatever identity you choose for yourself. **But the Christian gospel offers so much more – it offers power.** The power to transform you into a new creation in Christ – where the old has gone and the new has come (2 Cor 5:17).

- ❖ There's another Disney movie with a character whose story arc communicates a message very different than Elsa's. It's the opposite of expressive individualism. **His name is Forky, and he's from *Toy Story 4*.** He's a spork decorated with googly eyes and a red pipe cleaner for arms. He was made by a preschooler named Bonnie.
 - When Forky meets the other toys for the first time, he's confused. He thinks he's trash because, honestly, that's what he's made of. **So because Forky feels like trash, he keeps trying to throw himself in the trash bin.** Which leaves the rest of Bonnie's toys with the difficult task of convincing Forky that he's not trash – he's a toy. He's Bonnie's toy. **She made him out of trash, but she made him to be her toy.**
 - That truth had the power to transform Forky. To radically change his identity. He finally saw himself through the eyes of his maker. **Friends, the point is that Forky didn't find happiness by searching his heart.** His heart just told him he's trash. He found happiness by listening to his friend and believing what they told him about the one who made him and what he was made to be.

- ❖ **Friends, you can experience a similar kind of transformation.** Not by looking within, but by listening to your friends and the gospel message they have to tell you about the One who made you and what you were made to be.
 - Scripture says we're made of dirt. We come from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7). But we're not just dirt. **God made us out of dirt, but he made us to be his children.** His love for you as a Father is so great that he sent his one True Son to live the life we should've lived and die the death we should've died. That we might be adopted as sons and daughters – if we only trust in his Son, the Lord Jesus. **Your true identity and true happiness comes from finally seeing yourself through the eyes of your Maker and Redeemer.** You are loved as his child. That's who you are.