



Left in Charge

Genesis 1:1-2:4; Psalm 8; Matt. 28:16-20; Romans 8:22-25

Everyone wants to be in charge. We don't necessarily want the responsibility of being in charge. We just want to dictate how things are done, as well as when they are accomplished. We want our opinions valued. We want our values respected. We want our concerns taken seriously. We want some level of control to protect our interests. If nothing else, we want to call the shots to be sure no one else is calling them!

More often than not, however, we do not find ourselves not in control. Maybe we did not assume responsibility. Maybe a more forceful personality took the reins. Maybe no one trusted us to see things through. Maybe we prefer to complain and grumble than to get things done. Who would want to leave us in charge? As strange as it may seem, we were left in charge. Perhaps we were not given control individually, but as the human race we were tasked with caring for God's creation. Why would God put us in charge of so much?

Genesis says we are given charge over God's work. We are caretakers of creation—stand-ins for the Master of the Universe. Isn't that a scary thought! What with global warming, mass deforestation, species extinction, strip mining, two world wars, nuclear arms, industrial pollution, abuse of natural resources, and other destruction we have caused since the founding of America, what could God have been thinking to have left us in charge?

Anyone here feel up to running the world? Anyone ready to vote me in as governor, senator, president, or maybe ruler of the world? (*So much for all my political aspirations...*) Maybe you trust me a little more than the rank and file citizen, at least insomuch as you called me to be your pastor. You still don't want to nominate me for ruler of the world. So why would God place such as ourselves, including the rank and file John Doe—even those we keep behind bars—to take care of creation on God's behalf?

We are all aware of the gross failures of those who get into such offices. We are often loath to back political candidates for fear of ulterior motives. We get antsy when someone says, "I am from the government. I am here to help you." We are more likely to believe there is some hidden motive to advance another's political good at our expense. We hear the phrase "government of the people, for the people, by the people," but don't really trust the application. That's why our constitution was written with a system of checks and balances of power. We don't trust giving others power. Why should God trust us any more than we are willing to trust each other?

For whatever reason, God chose to leave us in charge of creation, ruling the world in God's stead. This is what being created "in the image of God" is really all about.¹ We like to think of "the image of God" as what distinguishes us from animals. We refer to some aspect of God's Spirit placed in us, but Genesis uses the same term for spirit and the living breath placed in animals. We like to talk about God's image as that which allows us to commune with God, but the Bible speaks of all creation in that sense, to the point of groaning for redemption.

¹ Harbin, Christopher B., "Imago Dei, (God's Image)" in *Narratological Theology and Homiletics*. ©Copyright 2002, 2004, 2007, text available online at http://www.theotrek.org/resources/th/2007_Narratological_Theology_and_Homiletics.pdf, p. 23-24.

Being created in God's image is no static condition or quality in which to rest. It is rather the responsibility of filling in for God in caring for all God has created. It is God's apparently unwarranted faith in us to represent God's concerns within the created order. As stewards, we were placed in charge.

If we want a clearer picture of the meaning of God's image, we simply look to Jesus. He is the fully developed image of God in human form. Jesus is who we SHOULD be, though we fail to arrive at his level of character and responsible stewardship. Jesus is the full character and identity of God, present in flesh and blood. He is the image of the invisible God become visible.

I remember back in high school being placed in charge of the adult choir at a little church Dad was serving as interim pastor. I took the job with fear and trembling, unsure whether I was fit for the job. Sure, I had sung in choirs, but I had never been taught to lead one! The only instrument available was a guitar I couldn't play and the guitarist only played by ear. I felt out of my league, unprepared, and completely unsure of myself. How much more should we feel uncertain about being caretakers of God's creation!

There is more to the story, though. We were left in charge of creation, to care for it and manage it as God's representatives. We were also left in charge of the gospel message of saving grace in Christ Jesus. In Christ, we are taught to live as we were created to live. We are also entrusted with the message of redemption for which the world groans in anticipation. The message is we can be freed from slavery to our sinful and selfish ways of living—our destructive manner of life—and granted grace.

God was not content to leave us in charge of the planet. He also gave us as disciples of Jesus the charge to extend his presence and ministry by sharing everything we have learned of God through Christ with others. This charge is to change our lives. It is to make a difference in the way we care for others and the world as stewards of God's world and gospel of grace.

The psalmist says God has placed us just a little lower than the "gods," or angels of heaven. I hardly think this means that we are such wonderful creatures, naturally doing all the right things. If this were the case, we would not have brought about so much destruction, waste, and death. Rather, we were created with potential. We were birthed with possibility to become more than we naturally are. We were invited to join God's creative effort in bringing about life and possibility where there is death and devastation. As stewards of God's gifts, we are also invited to participate in God's efforts to create a world that sustains life, love, grace, and forgiveness.

As Christ Jesus in the gospel, we are charged to be light in darkness, life amid death, hope amid despair, and possibility amid failure. The task and responsibility at hand are not about pointing fingers at the failure of others, but assuming the stewardship we have been entrusted. It is gospel that we are to protect the world. It is gospel that we are to prepare the world for eternity with Christ. It is gospel that our stewardship of the earth flows from our responsibility as representatives of God's presence in the world. We are charged to "Go Green," to "Go Gospel," to grow into the stamp of God's image in the world of God's creation.

We wanted to be in charge. The scary thing is, we were placed in charge. So what will we do, now that we have been left in charge of the world and the gospel of Christ Jesus?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*