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## “The Creation Mandate”

Sermon Series: “Faith & Finance,” No. 1

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### Genesis 1:26 – 2:3s

*1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth.” 27 So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heaven, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

*29 Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing herb that sows seed on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. 30 I also give every green plant as food for all the wild animals of the earth, for all the birds of heaven, and for everything that creeps on the earth in which is the breath of life.” It was so. 31 Then God saw everything He had made, and indeed, it was very good. So evening and morning were the sixth day.*

*2:1 Thus heaven and earth and all their adornment were finished. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the works He made, and He rested on the seventh day from all the works He made. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His works God began to make.*

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We’re heading to the first chapter of Genesis, if you’d like to turn there with me. Beginning at the end of Genesis 1.

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I have often **heard** the claim...I may have even **made** the claim at some point...that Jesus’ most **frequent teaching topic** has to do with handling money.

Let me say...that is **not** true.

What **is** true is...Jesus **refers** to money and financial issues in His teachings very, very often...not because money is more important than faith or God’s Kingdom or something like that, but because finances are such a huge part of human life, using money in illustrations let His hearers connect easily with His greater point.

How we handle finances is just an enormous part of life...even in Jesus' day it was...which is why it's important to address the relationship between faith and finances...and to do so, frankly, more often than I do.

I know I **mention** money here and there, and the church offers classes from time to time about financial things, but it's been nearly ten years since we've done a message series on the relationship of finances and faith.

So...here we are.

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Now, going into a study like this, one basic truth we need to understand, and that much of our world does **not** understand, is that **theology**—our understanding of God—**is** the **center point** from which all other disciplines radiate. It doesn't matter what you study: history, math, language, science, economics, foreign relations, whatever; when you reach a certain depth in your discipline, the study always becomes philosophical, and...

at the root of all philosophy is theology. It takes **theology** to answer life's biggest questions.

Very often though, people unfortunately settle in at a certain place in their discipline and, for whatever reason, don't let themselves move to the depth of theology.

They'd rather settle for calling those deeper questions "unanswerable" than to deal with the theological issues of origins and absolutes and how those things interact with their discipline.

And that's a shame, because it's the deeper, **theological** answers that people are really looking for, whether they know it or not. It's in those **deeper things** that real answers appear...and real **heart change** can occur.

And of course, presenting the **theological**...the spiritual dimension...is the work of the **Church**. The secular world's certainly not going to turn people's attention to spiritual things, right?

I mean, when's the last time you heard a news anchor say, "And now, for the spiritual underpinnings of this story, let's go to chief theology correspondent ...Wes Lee."

That **never** happens, because our **nation**...our **world** doesn't understand that **theology**...not **only** cuts **across every idea, issue and discipline**, but it is, in fact, their very **source**.

Whatever the problem:

from immigration to economic issues,

from health care to home loans,

from insurance to intolerance,

from nation building to unending wars,

from Epstein to Diddy...all the biggest news stories come down to theology:

what's right, what's wrong,

what's healthy, what's destructive,

what's good, what's bad...and who gets to decide.

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Now of course, the government's answer to that last question is always, "We do! We get to decide!"

And that means *regulation*.

The government's answer is always to take more control of this or that area of life...give the power to a few and let *them* determine how things should work for everybody.

Personally, I'm no fan of government regulation. I agree with Lord John Acton, who wrote in 1887, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>1</sup> One of the reasons our nation was founded and organized the way it was is because our forebears understood the truth of that.

At the same time, in a broken world, if we're to have any sort of livable order, then there has to be some level or regulation.

So it's a necessary evil in a sinful world.

But here's the thing: no matter what you think of regulation, it still doesn't get to the heart of the problem.

Regulation treats *symptoms*.

Regulation never *cures*.

The very need for regulation should immediately remind us that something is wrong in our society at a *deeper* level...and *that* should push us toward the *spiritual* realm.

Take police, for example. Police are regulators of human behavior, so every time we see a police car, it should remind us that we need external regulation because things here are not as God intended in creation. There's evil in our world...from our trigger finger to our right foot, and the more evil is at work, the more external mechanisms are needed to limit and suppress it.

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<sup>1</sup> Lord John Acton, in a letter written in 1887 to Bishop Mandell Creighton.

So regulation is *necessary*, but it's *not* the *solution*. At best, it manages symptoms, and at worst, it creates *more* problems...because sometimes *evil* gets *into* the *regulations*...*and*...into the *regulators*.

That's why if you want to get serious about *solving problems*...social, economic, political, relational, whatever...you have to go deeper; past the nuts and bolts of the specific discipline...and move on to philosophy and then to theology.

And theology tells us the solutions are not in *regulation*, but rather in *transformation*.

To really *solve* issues, including *financial* issues...like *greed* and *dishonesty* and *pride* and *envy* and *laziness*...those have to be attacked at their core, and that's the work of God by His Spirit.

That's the transformation of the way people think and what we value and how we treat others...and that's what Jesus came to make possible.

*That's* what will change *our culture...from within*.

Laws, rules, restrictions, fences, enforcers...that all *helps*...but that's not our *hope*.

Our *hope* is in the transforming power of the gospel...which can change people at their *core*.

When a person really embraces Jesus and gives Him control of their life, Jesus begins to transform that person into the person God created them to be.

That's real change; and that's a *spiritual* issue.

That changes a person's behavior *from the inside*.

He changes the inward root...which then changes the outward fruit.

In fact, Jesus says that, with His help, we can be totally free of all evil thoughts and tendencies. We can be clean in our deepest places.

That's transformation: not just **knowing** what's right and wrong, but actually being **empowered** to **do** and **think** and **be** right.

That's why the Church's message is, "Jesus saves!"

That's not just an **eternal** thing. That's a **today** thing!

Judeo-Christian principles and truths, coupled with the transforming power of the Spirit of the risen Christ, can **save cultures** and **nations here and now**.

That's transformation.

That's the **hope** and **mission** and **message** of the Church, and that's how theology works in every area of life, including our financial lives.

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I want to give just one practical example of how this works from verse 28 here...the "creation," or "cultural mandate;" and how our world's moral choices affect our financial lives.

Genesis 1:28 says, "**God blessed them** (Adam and Eve) **and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'**"

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David Goldman cuts through all the talk of credit problems and poverty concerns and inflation and interest rates and debt that's in our news these days by writing about the need to look at the problems of our world with, his words, "a kind of simplicity."<sup>2</sup>

What he does, consistently, is...he gets to the theological core of our world's financial problems. Specifically, he writes, "Everyone says the problem is with things like credit, interest, supply, demand etc. But what they aren't saying is that all those derive from the cycle of human life."

Here's how that goes: young people almost always need to borrow capital to buy houses and start families and businesses. Old people need to earn income on the capital they've saved, so either directly or through investment companies and banks, old people lend to the young.

Old people invest their assets in the young and in the formation of their lives.

Goldman writes, "All the armamentarium" – and I confess, I had to look up that word, I had no idea what it means. It basically means 'stuff, trappings, equipment.'

"All the trappings of modern capital markets boil down to investing in a new generation so that they will provide for us when we're old."

You follow that? It means the old invest in the young, and when that happens, the old earn interest, the young are able to build their futures, and as people reproduce and age, the cycle goes on.

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<sup>2</sup> David P. Goldman. Demographics and Depression. First Things.2009

Now consider this: The American population has risen from 200 to almost 350 million people since 1970, but the number of two parent families with children is the same today as it was in 1963, and the same is true in Europe, Canada, Japan...nearly all of the industrialized world.

In those countries, in increasing numbers, people are choosing to not have children, leave marriages and split families, which always leaves everyone involved financially poorer.

In those same countries, people are, at record levels, aborting children and choosing gay and lesbian lifestyles...and with all that, children aren't being born, and futures aren't being planned for...

And the financial result of all these things is...we're all getting poorer.

Goldman writes,

"The world is poorer now because the present generation did not bother to rear a new generation. Our nation is...less prolific for a variety of reasons, most of them immoral, and as a result we are poorer and will get poorer still, no matter what economic policies we put in place."

You see, immorality...doing things against God's design...directly affects our financial health – on a global scale.

Immorality harms us, financially...which means, the spiritual world directly impacts the way we live every day.

And while forgiveness is certainly offered and restoration is available for any of us who make these decisions, the results of those decisions never just disappear. They actually affect the bottom line for us all.

The real answer to our economic problems is found in theology. Most people either ***don't*** or ***won't*** see that connection, but as Christ followers, we have to see it.

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Of course we believe that human life is sacred for its own sake. Human life does not just equal "tax deduction."

Human life is not merely an instrument to provide us with more income.

But both wealth and positive cultural progress depends, ultimately, on the natural order of human life, and when we make decisions against that order...God's order...there are consequences to our behavior.

God's given us some pretty basic rules by which we are to live and by which societies can grow and build, but as we eliminate our young (by any number of means,) we work against God's order, and anytime you work against God's order, you pay a cost.

The world's industrialized nations are really just beginning, historically speaking, to pay the financial cost for the disintegration of families.

Maybe this is what will wake up a new generation of Americans.

Maybe our financial losses will finally spark a new life in the American church and cause her to put her faith back in God and His truths. I don't know.

I **do** know this: if we're to survive, much less thrive, as a nation, we have to look deeper than most of our policy makers do, in order to solve our financial issues.

It's not just about Jerome Powell changing the interest rate or hiring the right economic advisor.

The answers to our biggest issues are always theological.

God has the solutions.

The question is, will we listen to Him?

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Of course, we can't speak for our nation, but we can speak for us.

Will **you** and I listen to Him...to His word...in the way we live and the choices we make?

Will we take the time to discover the theological truths that lie behind every problem, so we can stop just addressing symptoms and start really solving problems?

So we can pursue transformation – in us and in our world?

There will always be those who'll jump on every bandwagon of easy fixes that comes along.

But there are others who are willing to look deeper...if we'll help show them where to look...for real answers to life's biggest questions...even about money.

Our call is to do that...to help people find the transformed life in Jesus that really, truly makes a difference.

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## **Prayer**

## **Communion**

**Closing Song:** "How Firm a Foundation"

## **Closing Word & Benediction**

Back in 1986, Father Richard John Neuhaus wrote a book called "The Naked Public Square," which basically is a lament of the fact that God has been sidelined from public discussion and debate in our nation.

Neuhaus says whenever God is taken out of the mix, there will always remain a vacuum, because when the single most important element in any society is removed, humanity will try to fill that space with something – usually money or government.

The church can't force God on anyone. We've been there. We've tried to do that in days past, and doesn't workout so well.

But there are things that we can do ... you and I.

For example, we can talk about God to our friends like He's real.

We can talk about Him like He makes and impact in all of the different situations of life – not just on Sunday morning or Sunday evening.

We can speak the name of Jesus in our daily tasks.

We can seriously bring His word to bear in our lives and in our circles of influence ... no matter what that may cost.

We can openly live under His authority for others to see.

And we can pray ... we can pray faithfully

... that God would turn other's hearts to Him

... that they would turn their hearts to Him

... and that God would be able to fill that vacuum in their lives and in the lives of even nations that are searching for something to fill that vacuum.

All that – that's what it means to lift up Jesus, and that is certainly the mission of the Church.

It will cost us – we will pay a cost for doing that. People will look at us like we are crazy. Absolutely.

But lift up Jesus anyway, because in every way, Jesus really is the hope of the world. He *is* the hope of the world.

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Thanks for coming to worship. The Lord bless and keep you. Amen

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