

The Transgender Movement and the Gospel

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Date: 22 August 2021

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Genesis chapter 1. Please follow along the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 26, we read, Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it. And in verse 31, God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed. Evening came, and then morning, the sixth day. This is the word of God. Okay, great. Thank you, Betty. Let's pray together as we respond to God's word. Heavenly Father, we need you every hour of every day.

God, our lives have been made by you, created by you, for your glory, and our good. And Father, we come to you this morning, because you are the one that not only knows us the best, but you love us the most. Father, as we look at this passage, and as we look at this topic, we ask for your wisdom. We ask, Christ, that you really will help us to get clarity, and to think through these things, with the mind of Christ. God, this is a topic which is not just academic, and theoretical. It involves such deep pain, and trauma, for so many people. And we pray, God, for not only clarity of what your word says, but the accompanying grace that you offer. Jesus, you came to our world full of grace, and truth. And we pray that we, as a church, will be the same.

And so we ask this morning, God, for your spirit to be here. We ask that you speak to our hearts and minds. And God, as we say all the time, if there's anything that I say which is not of you, and doesn't correspond with your will, Lord, I pray to fall on deaf ears. God, we want to know your will, your word, your mind this morning. As we pray this in your wonderful, and your gracious, and your tender name. Amen.

Laura Perry grew up in a home in the middle of the U.S., the Midwest, a home that by all accounts looked like a very healthy and happy home, but was deeply broken inside. When she grew up, she had two brothers, and it was obvious that her mom, with whom she had a very broken relationship, favored her brothers. And her brothers got all the attention, and she was sidelined.

[2 : 54] And so from a very young age, she couldn't help think, if only I was born a boy, I would have been loved and accepted in this family. Soon after that, at the age of eight, she was molested by another boy at a similar age, and she became hyper-sexualized. And so she soon was addicted to pornography.

In high school and at college, she was extremely sexually active, finding people online, anyone that she could sleep with. Whether she knew them or not, she would drive across the state to find them, and engage in sexual encounters. But ironically, she says the more that she threw herself at people sexually, in order of looking for love and affection, the more they treated her like trash.

And so being anxious and depressed, thinking that, realizing nothing was satisfying her, she hears about this thing called the transgender identity, and what it means. And she remembers her childhood fantasies of thinking, if only I was a boy. And she starts to wonder, maybe the problem is that actually I'm a man trapped in a lady's body. And so she explores this for a couple of years, she goes to some support groups, she eventually socially transitions to a man. And in 2009, she starts hormone treatment, her shoulders broaden, her voice breaks, she grows facial hair. And later on that year, she goes for surgery. She has a double mastectomy, she legally changes her name, she legally changes her sex from female to male. And in her mind, Laura is dead, and Jake is now alive. And so Laura transitions to Jake Perry. We'll pick up on that story a little later.

As we've said this morning, we are talking about transgenderism. We've been looking at all these big topics in the Bible. And there's so much to say, you're going to need to try and stay with me. I'm

going to see how much we can cover this morning. I want to say just by way of introduction, a couple of things. The first thing is this. The subject or the topic of transgenderism is a very complex subject. It's extremely complicated. And Andrew Bunt, who's from the UK and dealt with this quite a lot, he writes and he says that while transgenderism is one of the most prominent topics in our culture at the moment, it's also one of the most complicated. And in order to partake of this conversation, we need to grapple with theology, what the Bible says, but also things like biology, psychology, medicine, philosophy, psychology, and politics, all while keeping in mind that the people we're talking about are not just issues. They're real people that are made by God, created by God, loved by God, and who are experiencing considerable distress. And so it's a very, very complex topic that can go in many directions. The second thing to think about is the diversity of people's experiences. Preston Sprinkle says, if you ask 12 different people about their experience of transgenderism, you're probably going to get 15 different answers. And he's not trying to be funny, but what he's saying is that you can't just pigeonhole and say, well, all transgender people are like this.

There's a wide diversity of experiences of trauma, of background, of reason, of understanding of what people, why it's brought people to where they're at. And the third thing to say by introduction is that while we can talk about transgenderism, actually, it's not really an issue or debate or principle. This is actually a topic about people. It's about people that are dearly loved, that are created by God. And while this can be new to us, and we're trying to understand the concept, what we need to be absolutely clear on is that this whole topic is about people that God made and Jesus went to the cross for. And so we've got to really personalize that and realize that this isn't just a policy or debate or an issue. This is people that we love. It could be family members. It could be people here this morning. And then the fourth thing I want to say is that we might be tempted to think, oh, okay, this is a Western issue, right? But here in Hong Kong, we're a conservative culture. But it'd be good to realize this is front and center in what's happening in the young people of Hong Kong ourselves. I just had to say to some friends this morning that we're saying at a school here in Hong Kong, kids aged nine and 10 were being taught in the classroom. There are 16 different genders that you can choose from, and you need to choose what is your gender, nine and 10 years old. And so right here in our city, this is very current and very real, okay? So that's by way of introduction. Four things I want us to look at today. Firstly, what is transgenderism? Secondly, what does scripture say about gender and humanity?

[7 : 51] Thirdly, what does the gospel say about our identity? And fourthly, what does all this mean for us as a watermark family? Okay, so firstly, what is transgenderism? Let's try and understand the concept a little bit.

In order to understand it, we need to understand a bunch of terms. And there's four terms I want us to think about. Sex, gender, gender dysphoria, and transgender. So what do these terms mean? Well, up until about the 1970s, generally as society, we use the word sex and gender interchangeably. Okay, it was seen as the one and the same thing. I'm a male sex, I have male masculine gender, okay? Or female, female gender and sex. We use those terms interchangeably. But in the last 50 years, that has changed. And there's a distinction now in our language, we talk about sex and gender. Sex is the biological reality of your body, whether someone is biologically male or female. Men have XY chromosomes, women have XX chromosomes. These result in physiological and hormonal differences in men and women. And what that means is that our bodies, right from the way that our bodies look and our reproductive organs, right down to the cells in our body, there's a difference in the physiological makeup of the human body. Okay, that's pretty straightforward. No one really disagrees with that.

Second thing is gender. Now, like I said, up until 50 years ago, gender and sex were considered the same thing. But now, when we talk about gender, it's much more complicated. And Mark Yorhaus, who is really an expert in this, defines gender as referring to the psychological, the social, and the cultural aspects of being male or female. So it's not so much a physiological body, it's the way that we think and feel about ourselves, both personally, but also in the way that we relate to others. So the psychological, the social, and the cultural aspect of being male or female. And there's three things that we need to think about this. There's gender identity, so which is how do I feel about myself personally? I may be biologically male, but how do I think about myself? Do I think of myself as male or female? That's gender identity. Secondly is gender expression. This has to do with things like dress code, the way you act, the way you express your gender. And then the third thing

is gender roles, which is a culture's expectations for how males and females should act. Okay? Now, like we said, we've often thought of these, or let me say it this way. Up until recently, up until this generation, we've always believed as a culture and society and humanity that biological sex and internal gender go hand in hand, that they're connected. And that gender follows on from sex.

If your biological sex, the genetic wiring of your body is male, your gender will follow on from that. Okay? But as Andrew Walker points out, one of the things that's changed in our generation is that for the first time in history, we've disconnected these two and said these two things need not be the same. You can be biologically male and your gender can be female. Okay? So that's an important distinction. Third thing is gender dysphoria. Now, what happens is when somebody experiences the deep distress or the inner anguish or anxiety that people live with, when they feel there's a disconnect between my biological sex and my internal gender, that disconnect produces this deep anguish or anxiety that's known as gender dysphoria. Okay? So, um, now there's two important things to say about gender dysphoria. The one is gender dysphoria is an experience, not an identity. It's not a label.

[11 : 48] It's not who you are. It's an experience that you go through. Okay? And when, if you, if somebody experiences gender dysphoria, this doesn't make you a transgender person. It just means that you have the experience of gender dysphoria. So it's an experience, not a label or an identity. That's important.

The second thing to note is this. Those who experience gender dysphoria, like we've said before, are real people with a real medical or psychosomatic condition. So it's tempting sometimes to think of people that experience gender dysphoria as weirdos or freaks or perverts or child molesters or something like that. And that's really not the case. People experience gender dysphoria are real loved people of our family. It could be a brother or a sister, a son or a daughter. It could be a member of a church, a colleague that you work with at night of Monday to Friday. These are real people that we love and care about. Anybody can experience gender dysphoria to varying degrees. Okay? So sex, gender, gender dysphoria. Now, as a result of this dysphoria, this deep inner conflict between the biological sex and what people feel internally, some people believe that only by living as the opposite sex or living as the sex that my internal state identifies with, can I be fully human, fully alive, fully free? Can I be the person I was made to be? And such people then transition and take on or live as that gender. Okay?

So I may be biologically male. I feel internally female. And as I choose to live as a female, that then is a transgendered person. And again, there's three things we need to know about this. Okay? There's about a hundred things we're going to learn this morning. Okay? Three things. Now, there's three ways that we can transition. Some people transition socially. That means that they dress according to the gender that they identify with. They maybe take on that name, take on those mannerisms. Their behavior accords with that gender identity.

Social transition. Some people transition hormonally. So they'll take on certain hormones that will cause their body to change shape and look like the gender that they identify with rather than their biological body.

[14 : 02] So a lady will take testosterone hormones. It'll make their shoulders broaden, their voice break, grow facial hair, etc. A man may take more estrogen and his body will change accordingly.

And then thirdly, some people will transition surgically. They'll go for medical, surgical intervention to look like the gender that they identify with. Okay? So I don't know if that brings any clarity at all. Sex, gender, gender dysphoria, transgender. Okay? So that's the first thing. Second thing. What does the Bible say about gender and humanity? Now, again, to answer this, I want us to think about it in two ways. What does the Bible say generally and what do we say specifically? Firstly, generally.

When we think of these massive topics like marriage and sex and gender and who should I marry and who should I love, we've got to answer a couple of questions. And I want to give us three questions.

This is from Andrew Walker's book. We're going to answer the question of authority. Who has the right to tell me what is right and wrong? The question of knowledge. Who knows me the best and knows what's best for me? And thirdly, the question of trustworthiness. Who loves me enough and wants the best for me?

[15 : 19] Okay? So who has the right to tell me what to do? Who knows me the best and who loves me the most? Now, I want us to think about that because what culture you come from, you're going to answer those questions differently. If you're from a more Western culture, you grew up in America or Canada or South Africa or something, how do we answer those questions? We answer them with respect to myself.

I have the ultimate authority of my life. I know what's best for me and I love myself the most and I know what's best for me. Okay? Me, myself and I. If we come from a more Asian or traditional culture, if I'm allowed to comment, because, you know, I'm Asian, really. I identify as Asian. If you come from a more traditional culture, how do we answer that question? It's the family, right? My family has authority to tell me what's right or wrong. My family knows me the best. My family loves me the most. And so depending on what culture you're going to come from, we're either going to get that answer by looking internally at ourselves or by looking to our families.

Christianity comes along and says, while your family probably has the best intentions, your family doesn't have perfect perspective and you don't have perfect perspective on yourself, but there is a God, a creator, sovereign God who created the world and so he knows how to operate. But he also knows you the best. He knows you better than you know yourself. But he also loves you enough to go to the cross and to die on the cross for you. And therefore, if you really want the answers to these questions, you've got to find out what does God have to say about it, okay? Vaughan Roberts, who himself lives with same-sex attraction, says it like this, because God created the world and because God is sovereign, and I would add because Jesus loved you enough to go to the cross for you, obedience is always the wise thing to do, no matter what the cost.

It is never wise to go against God's will, because to go against God's will is not only disobedient, it's foolish. It's the most unwise thing that you can do, okay? So that's generally. So now, specifically, what does God say about gender and humanity? And that's where we come to our passage today in Genesis chapter 1 that Betty read to us. And I want us to notice four things from this passage, okay? The first thing is this, God's world has a coherent and a clear design. One of the fascinating things about Genesis 1 is there's this constant debate, right, in Christian circles between Christianity and science. We often think, you know, science has disproved Christianity. And people often look at Genesis 1 and say, we know the world is 3.46 billion years old, how can you say the world is only made in six days, okay, et cetera, et cetera. But one of the things that's fascinating is Genesis 1 accounts for the creation of the world, but it's like one page in your Bible. There's not a lot of detail here. And I think what that tells us is Genesis 1 is not meant to try to give us all the details about how the world was made. What Genesis 1 is trying to tell us is firstly, who made the world, that is made by the sovereign God. It's not an accident. It's not a matter of chance. And it's made with a clear and coherent design. As we read Genesis 1, one of the things you'll notice is that nothing is arbitrary in God's design of the world. The world is made in these epochs that are not random, but are ordered. And each element of creation is unique and important, but it also has its corresponding pair. There is morning and there is evening. There is heavens and there is earth. There is the sun and there is the moon. There is this orderliness to creation. And at the climax of this, God says, this is good. He's pleased with his diverse but perfectly ordered creation. And then the pinnacle of creation comes to humanity. And there we see again this order, this diversity, the complementarity of humanity, but this order to God's creation of human beings. There is male and there is female.

[19 : 26] Different, complementary, but not interchangeable. And the complementary nature of humanity, male and female, that male and female are equally important, equally valuable, necessary for God's world, is described as being very good. Okay? And what this means for us in our discussion is that part of God's ordered, coherent design for the world is that sex and gender is binary, male and female, and that they are not, our sex and our psychological gender are not disconnected from each other. There's a compatibility, there's a congruence between the two. And this is part of God's good, coherent, ordered design. There's not a confusion or a mismatch. Our gender and our sex are not arbitrary, but are connected together, but are connected together, and they correspond in God's good, coherent design. Okay? That's kind of a general overview of Genesis 1. The second thing we see from Genesis 1 is this, that our feelings do not dictate our ultimate identity. Okay? Or another way of saying that is that identity is not self-assigned by how we feel. So we live in an age where what we feel is true generally trumps what is actually true. Do you remember a few years ago, Oprah Winfrey, it was some big awards, I can't remember if it was the

Golden Globes or something, she stands up and in her acceptance speech, she says, I just want to say to you, the most important thing about you is your truth. And we all clapped and applauded and said, yes, yes, yes. Because we live in an age where what I feel to be true, what is true for me, is taken as being ultimate reality. Now, we can understand that because feelings are really profound, right? What we feel is very deep. But

Christianity says that your identity is not found in how you feel about yourself, like modern secular culture says. Your identity is not found in what your family says about you, like traditional culture. Christianity says that your identity is found in who you are in relation to your maker, your God. And as human beings, our identity is partly found in the fact that we are made in God's image.

So look at Genesis 1 with me again. You should have it in your bulletin. Look at verse 26. It says, God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. So he created man in his image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good. So Christians believe that our primary identity is not found in our social construct. It's found in who we are to God. Now, what does that mean that we are made in God's image?

To be made in God's image means that there's something uniquely precious, eternally valuable, and dignifying about every human being just by virtue of the fact that you are made in God's image. [22 : 28] So irrespective of your race, your ethnicity, your culture, your gender, your religion, what you believe, what agenda you identify with, irrespective of any of those things, your being a human confers upon you a dignity and a value and a worth which is given to you because written into your DNA is the fact that you carry the family genes of the sovereign God, the creator of the world.

And every human being is infinitely, sorry, the infinitely wonderful and glorious God, when he looks upon you, he sees a part of his nature inside of you, and he's very pleased with what he sees. Okay? So there's something eternally precious, eternally valuable about the fact that you are you. You're not an accident. You're not an evolutionary byproduct. You are uniquely valuable, not because of what you've done, or what you've achieved, or what status you've achieved in society, or in relation to anyone else, but purely by the fact that you are made in God's image and God breathes you into existence. Okay? Does that make sense? Now, what that means is that you are not primarily what you feel about yourself. Now, we're of course not saying that feelings aren't important, or that they're not a very real experience or part of you. Feelings are very real. And if you feel this dysphoria between your biological sex and your gender, that's very real, and we're not saying that's not important.

But that's not ultimately who you are. Your primary identity is that the God of all creation looks at you and says, my precious child that is made in my image. Because your ultimate identity, the identity that you need to live out in order to be fully human is who God has said about you. Now, I want to say this very carefully, because this can sound mocking, and I really don't want to come across like that. I want to be careful about this. But I want us just to think about the logic that says you are who you feel yourself to be.

Do you remember a few years ago, I think it was 2015, there was a lady called Rachel Dolezal in the U.S. who was a white Caucasian lady who said that she was African American or had a colored heritage, right?

[24 : 58] And she was actually the president of a chapter of the North American Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Okay? So she was president of this organization that helped black African Americans advance their cause, right? And she said that she was, her parents, her father was African American, and so she was black by, you know, biology. But what actually emerged is that she actually has no African American heritage at all. Her parents are two Caucasian people. She is 100% white Caucasian.

And so when this emerged, there was a whole big uproar about it. And then she said, well, I'm actually transracial. I identify as a black person. This is who I am. And there's an uproar because a bunch of the African Americans in America said, you can't just claim that identity because that's how you feel. I mean, we appreciate that you want to advance our cause, but just claiming that you think of yourself as a black person doesn't make you a black person. And this is true that if I say to you, I am, you know, a 56-year-old Chinese lady, and I really feel like that, as much as Hong Kong's my home, and, you know, we love Hong Kong, and, you know, I think of myself as Chinese as much as possible. The reality is how I feel about myself doesn't make that real. And of course, this can get absolutely absurd. There have been stories of, you know, 50-year-old men saying, I'm a

six-year-old girl and going to kindergarten, or 16-year-old girl saying, I'm a cat trapped in a lady's body, etc.

It can get absurd. But the point is, how you feel about yourself is not ultimately who you are. That's not your identity. Your identity is that you are assuming made in God's image, that God's God looked before the creation of the world and said, in this age, I want there to be a man, a lady called Dwight, or Claire, whoever, and I've made you in my image, and I love you. That's who you are. That's your identity. As powerful as feelings are, they do not determine who we truly are. Third thing we see from Genesis 1 is this. Our physical bodies are an important element of who we are. Now, this is interesting. In the first century, there was a kind of ideological, philosophical movement called Gnosticism. Gnosticism essentially says that the physical world is part of, or put it this way, Gnosticism essentially says there's a disconnect between the material and the immaterial world. And the material world is part of this broken, corrupted, evil system. And the immaterial world, the spiritual world, is good and healthy and God-honoring.

And the gods, whoever they are, are interested in the immaterial world, but our material physical world is all going to burn, and who cares about it anyway? And this thinking really influenced the church in the first century. And so if you'll remember, two weeks ago, Chris was speaking on sex from 1 Corinthians 6, and the Corinthians say this, food is for the stomach, stomach is for the food, the body is for sex, sex is for the body, what's the big deal? And what the Corinthians are saying is, if I love God with my heart, who cares what I do with my body? If I love Jesus with my heart, and my heart loves Him, well, my body I can do whatever I want with, right? And Paul writes back and says, no, your body is an important part of who you are. It's not your ultimate identity, but it's an important part of who you are. And Paul writes and says, your body is not just this empty shell that houses your soul, it's actually your body is part of your worship. Remember, he says it's a temple. What you do with your body is actually important in your relation to God. Remember in Romans 12, we looked at it for six weeks. In view of God's mercy, Murphy, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, not just your hearts, right? Jesus doesn't just say, just offer your hearts. Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

[28 : 55] And we see it again here in Genesis 1. Look at it with me again. Genesis doesn't say, God created mankind in His image. In the image of God, He created them, full stop.

The author of Genesis specifically goes on to state, the binary nature of our sexed bodies, male and female, is a part of what it means to be made in God's image. If you are a female, you are made in God's image as a female. If you are a male, part of your being male is the fact that you are made in God's image. In other words, our sexed bodies are good and are part of what it means to be made in God's image, a part of who we are. Our sexed bodies are not unimportant or superfluous to who we are, and they're not unimportant or superfluous to being made in God's image and to our identity. And so what this means is that when someone seeks to change their body, either through hormonal treatment or surgery, to align with an internal sense of my gender identity, that's not inconsequential. That's deeply, deeply traumatic because what we're seeking to do is to manually override a core part of who we are. One of the things that I didn't know until the last few weeks as I've been reading up about this is the massive number of people that have transitioned sex from one to the other, either hormonally or surgically, and have come to realize it didn't change who they were.

And the deep trauma and the deep anxiety and the deep distress that they feel before stays with them. Earlier we spoke about Laura Perry. I want you to carry on listening to what she says here. She says, after my surgery, I really liked the results. I liked how I looked physically. Okay, that's not the best photo, right? But that's her driver's license. That's Jake's driver's license. After my surgery, even though I liked the results and I liked how I looked physically, I realized surgery hadn't made me a man. I was legally a man. I could look down at my ID card and say that said male, but I was still the same person. And that was devastating to me because I really had believed that I would become a man. Friends, one of the things that parents are often told is that when kids struggle gender dysphoria is that if you don't allow your kids to transition, they will become suicidal and they may take their own lives. What we're not told is that the anxiety, depression, and suicidal rate after transition does not change. In one of the most comprehensive studies on transgender identity and sex reassignment was done in Sweden over a 30-year period. And they found that people, they studied people that had sex reassignment surgery 10 to 15 years afterwards and found that the suicide rate for those that had undergone sex reassignment surgery

maintained 20 times higher than that of their peers.

In other words, we told that I must do this in order to become myself. Otherwise, there's no point in living. But friends, almost, not all, a lot of those that have gone through this will tell us that it hasn't solved the problem. It hasn't changed them. And the anxiety and the trauma that are within them remain the same. So what does all this mean? Well, Dr. Paul McHugh, who is Distinguished Service Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and probably the world's foremost authority on gender dysphoria, he sums up 50 years of work like this. He says, And what Dr. McHugh is saying is that because sex change is actually physically impossible, impossible, it doesn't provide the long-term wholeness and happiness that people with gender dysphoria seek and need. Friends, this is incredibly important, but it's not popular. It's hard to hear. [33 : 18] Because God has made you and I in His image, because of who we are and our gender and our sex is part of who we are, our sex beings is not disconnected from who we are. And we can't just change our biological sex to correspond with an identity without going through deeply traumatic experiences. Ultimately, our identity is found in who we are in God. And so that leads us to the fourth thing, which is this.

Genesis 1 and 2 paint this amazing picture of creation, unbelievable picture. But when we look at the world around us, and when we look at the world inside of us, the world is not as beautiful as Genesis 1 and 2 paints. The world is deeply broken. And in fact, it's not long that we get into reading the Bible that we see why. And the reason is because in Genesis 3, the fall occurs. Humanity rebels against God, sin enters the world, and as a consequence, all of the world is broken. Isaiah describes it like this, that rather than the world being this lush garden of delight, it is a desert of thistles and thorns. Isaiah says, rather than the world being this lush garden of beauty, it is a desert of despair. And what the Bible says, and this is so important in order to understand our world, that the effects of the broken fall of the world around us are not just out there, but are actually inside of us. And the consequences of this are massive. One of the consequences is that all of our relationships are flawed and broken. Our relationships with God, our relationships with each other, but also our relationships with ourselves. All three of these relationships are flawed and are broken and need redemption. But because our relationship with God is broken, what that means is that our identity as His children made in His image, that too is damaged. And so now as human beings, we no longer find our identity in who we are in God. We find our identity by looking around us to people and society, but also looking inside of us to ourselves. And we find our identity primarily in saying, who do I feel that I am? Who does society say that I am? And so what that means is that the anguish and the agony and the intense discomfort and the disconnect that people feel with their bodies is not because you're a man trapped in a lady's body or a lady trapped in a man's body. It's because we live in a broken world where sin and suffering abound, where relationships with others, with ourselves and with God is deeply broken. The world creation is broken. But of course, that's not the end of the story because Genesis 3 ends with a promise. And it's a profound promise. It's a promise of hope. Genesis 3 ends with a promise that there will come a person, a human being born of the woman.

And this human being will overcome the brokenness and the fallenness in our world. He will overcome sin and suffering. And he will do so by initiating healing in our broken world. But Genesis warns that this person will pay a high price to bring healing and redemption to our world. He will overcome brokenness by taking on the brokenness of our world. He will overcome sin and suffering by taking on sin and suffering himself. He will be wounded and crushed even as he crushes the brokenness of our world.

And of course, as we read our Bibles, we discover this person is Jesus Christ. And so Jesus came as a man to defeat and push back darkness and brokenness by going to the cross and taking upon himself the brokenness and the sin and the suffering of humanity and of this broken world.

And so that leads us to the third thing, which is the hope of the gospel. If sin marred and damaged our identity as God's beloved children made in his image, Jesus Christ's work on the cross came to restore that and to bring healing and hope by giving us a new identity and a fuller identity. And I want us just to think for a few minutes about this identity that Jesus Christ gives us in the gospel. At the heart of the gospel, at the heart of Christianity, is the gospel tells us that you're, let's just think about this for a second, okay? If you've been a watermark, you would have heard this a few times. The heart of Christianity says, in the gospel, Jesus Christ gives us an identity. It says you're his beloved sons, daughters, God's beloved sons and daughters, not based on your performance, not

based on what you do, but based on Jesus' performance, okay? Christ's opinion of us, which is the only opinion that really matters, is not based on your success or your having life together, but Jesus' performance on the cross. In the gospel, God accepts us because of what Jesus did on the cross, not because of what you've done. And what that means is that Jesus Christ will give you the only identity in the world which is received and not achieved, okay? Every other identity is based on how well you do, how good a son you are, how good a daughter you are, how well you do at school, how well you do at college, where you raise in society status, how well you do at work, where you progress in the career ladder, whether you are conformed to society stereotypes of a man or a woman. Every other identity that you get is conferred upon you by your performance. It's achieved, it's earned, it's merited. Jesus Christ comes and he says,

[38 : 47] I'll give you an identity which is not achieved, it's simply given by grace. And what that means is it's an identity in which God calls us beloved sons and daughters, but it's an identity which is unshakable and no one can take it from you and it's open to anyone. Friends, you may be here this morning and you feel like you don't measure up. You're not who your parents wanted you to be.

You may feel like a failure. Jesus Christ comes and says, you're my beloved part of my family. God the Father looks at you and calls you son, daughter, chosen, loved, not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus has done on the cross. But the other thing it means is this, that the gospel says that the ultimate validator of your identity is God. And that means that no human being, no community, no family member, no cultural trend, not even your own feelings, holds the power over you. The person that has the power to validate you also has the power to invalidate you, to manipulate you, to abuse you. If you find your identity in society or anything that society promises you, you're handing the power of your life over to those people. In the gospel, God is the one who validates your identity. Jesus says, I died on the cross and God says, it is well accepted. It is finished. And that means that God in the Bible, he'll never invalidate you. He'll never abuse you. He'll never take advantage of you. He'll only ever love you. So to those of us that struggle with our sexual orientation or our gender identity, to those who felt like you should have been born a boy instead of a girl or vice versa, I know those feelings are deep and I know that they're really real. And the trauma you've experienced runs incredibly deep. But I want to say to you that changing your body to align with your gender identity is not the answer. Having hormonal treatment is not the answer. Having surgery or medicine, philosophy, meditation, experimentation is not the answer. The answer is found in a person.

The answer is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The answer is found in Jesus Christ who allowed his own body to be mutilated and ripped apart on the cross because he so loved you. The answer is found in the one who went to the cross for you because he doesn't hate you and he doesn't want you to hate himself. Friends, Jesus Christ claims to have all authority because he created the world. But Jesus Christ also claims to know you the best and knows what's best for you. But Jesus Christ proved his love for you by going to the cross and dying for you. And therefore, he's trustworthy. And you may say, but I've done all this stuff. I've changed my body. I've taken all this treatment. I've done all this stuff that I know God doesn't like. How will God ever accept me? Friends, this church is full of people that have done stuff that God doesn't like. That's the whole point of the gospel. That God doesn't accept us on the basis of what we've done, but on the basis of what Jesus has done. The identity and the grace that he gives us is not something you can earn or achieve. It's a gift that you receive by grace. Friends, the trans community, they will accept you, but they won't heal you. They won't heal the trauma in your heart. Jesus Christ will accept you, but he'll also heal the deep trauma and the wounds that you carry. Friends, maybe you've been told, because of your gender dysphoria, only by living as the opposite sex can you truly embrace yourself.

Friends, only by embracing Jesus Christ can you truly embrace who you were meant to be. And so the gospel comes and he says, your identity is not what you feel. Your identity is not what people say about you, what your parents say about you, what society says about you. Your identity is what Jesus Christ says about you. And he says that if you come to him, if you know him, if you allow yourself to be loved by him, he'll confer upon you an identity that no one can take from you, that is unshakable, that is rooted and grounded in an eternity because he went to the cross for you.

[43 : 00] Friends, Jesus Christ loves you more than anyone in this world will ever love you, and he'll never give up on you. That's the gospel.

Fourth thing is this. What does this mean for us at Watermark? Well, very simply, the gospel tells us that all human beings are equally valid, equally deserving, of equal dignity and respect, irrespective

of your theological view, worldview, your worldview, your gender, your gender identification. What the gospel tells us is that every one of us, from the preacher in the front, the transgender person in the third row, to whoever's in the back, every single one of us are fallen sinners and in need of God's grace, but desperately loved by God at the same time.

And what that means is that the gospel doesn't allow for any bigotry or judgmentalism. Do you remember the story in Luke 18?

Jesus tells this parable, and he says two people go to a temple. There's a Pharisee and a tax collector. And the Pharisee goes in, and he sees the tax collector, and he prays like this. He says, God, I thank you that I'm not like that man.

[44 : 20] And Luke tells us that Jesus told that story because that there were people around them who trusted in themselves and treated others with contempt. And what Jesus is saying here is that if we look down on others, if we look at others in society and say, well, God, I so thank you that I'm not like them, what that means is that we haven't understood the gospel at all.

We haven't understood God's grace at all. When Jesus was asked what's the most important of all the commandments, 600 commandments in the Old Testament, Jesus says this, love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and strength.

And secondly, love your neighbor as yourself. And how does the Bible define that love? Remember Paul's description in Corinthians 13? Remember what he says? Love is patient.

Love is kind. Love does not boast. It is not arrogant. It is not self-seeking. It is not irritable or resentful. Remember how Paul starts off, and he says, listen, if I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but if I have not love, I'm nothing.

If I give of my body to be burnt as a martyr, but I do not have love, it's all meaningless. If I give away all my money, everything I have to the poor, but I do not have love, it's all in vain.

[45 : 34] When Paul was writing those words, he wasn't writing a wedding sermon. He wasn't talking about romantic love. He was talking about the love that's meant to exist between human beings like us. And what the Bible says is that because all of us are sinners in need of God's grace, but all of us are sufferers in need of God's love, there's no room for anyone to look down upon others and say that I'm better than you.

And so what that means for us as a church family is how do we know that the gospel's really got a hold of us? How do we know that we really believe the gospel? We'll see it in the way that we patiently, graciously, gently, compassionately, tenderly treat the LGBT community in our city and in our church.

That those who grapple with gender dysphoria or those that have transitioned to an alternative sex will come into this church family and be met by love, not judgmentalism.

It means that we'll treat every person who walks into this family with dignity and honor, knowing that they are made in God's image, beloved sons and daughters in a sense, and that this church will be full of grace and truth just like Jesus.

I want us to close off by watching a short video, I think it's three minutes long, three or four minutes long, of Laura Perry, the lady I start off with in the beginning, and I want us to see her story and how it ends, and then we'll go to communion.

[47 : 01] So let's watch that now. After the surgery was over, I quickly forgot God. I forgot my prayer. Even though I was really excited about the results and I liked how it looked physically, I realized that my surgery hadn't made me a man.

I was legally male, and I could look down at my license and my birth certificate, and it said male. I still am the same person just without breath. And that was devastating to me because I really had believed that I would become a man.

I had hardly talked to my parents in years other than I would call them for an occasional birthday or something like that where I felt obligated. But one day my mom asked me to make a website for her Bible study.

And I didn't have any interest in the Bible, but I thought, okay, I'll make a website for you. And as I began to read her notes, I was blown away by what I was reading. And I thought, I have never seen the Bible like this.

I had always thought of the Bible as God's rule book. I'm seeing the character in the heart of God. And I began to see a loving and faithful God, not the angry, judgmental God that I had always seen before.

[48 : 07] I called her one day, and I said, Mom, you've got to explain some of this to me. And I was so curious, I called her again the next day and again the next day. And all of a sudden, I went from never talking to her to talking to her every single day.

And I would call her after work, and I just couldn't wait to talk to Mom at the end of the day. And then one day, something had happened, and I don't remember what, some kind of crisis had come up in my life.

And I'll never forget that day. She said, Honey, you just need to trust the Lord. And I was like, I was blown away at that moment, because I had never heard my mom say that.

And I said, Mom, what has happened to you? You are a totally different person from the one I grew up with. And she had been so radically transformed. And it was at that moment that I knew the gospel was true, that I knew that Christ was alive, and that there was a transforming power, because I could see how my mom had just been totally changed.

And so that night, I prayed, and I asked the Lord into my heart. But I really wanted to be a man of God. And I thought, this is great.

[49 : 14] Now I can find my identity in Christ. But I thought I could still stay as a man, because as much as I had realized I couldn't be a man, I could not face being a female.

There was so much pain attached because of what all those guys had done, all the lies I had believed all my life. I felt like it was a shameful thing to be a female. But after about a month of just crying out to the Lord, night after night after night, I had a clear vision of Jesus Christ himself getting down on one knee.

He reached his hand into the pit, and he said, Do you trust me? And I remember at that moment thinking, If I take his hand, he's asking me to leave everything. But I knew it was my only way out. I knew I was never going to have peace if I didn't. And so I did. I took his hand. I walked away from my entire identity, my partner, my job, my financial security, the life that I had built for myself, and left it all to follow Christ.

The next morning when I showed up at the Bible study, they surrounded me with more love and joy and hugs than I've ever felt from women in my life.

[50 : 24] They were so overjoyed at seeing their prayers of years answered. And it was at that moment that I was flooded with love from women, and I felt loved as a woman.

And it was like that transgender lie just broke, and I knew I was not meant to be a man. So many transgenders I know get to a point where they realize the same thing I did, that it's not real.

And you keep drifting through life, thinking this is the best it's ever going to get. You have no idea the life that God has for you. You can change your outward appearance.

You can change your body. But ultimately, you are who God created you to be, and you were put on this earth for His purpose. Great. I know this is a massive topic.

And to be honest, as I've read tons of books, or a couple of books, and tons of articles, and watched stories and testimonies, one of the things that's happened in my life is I've grown with this real compassion.

[51 : 35] Our world is a broken world. And our city is full of so much pain. Friends, there may be some of us here this morning that carry pain. It could be associated with this. It could be associated with something else.

Our world is broken, but Christ has come to bring healing. You've got to know the profound love of Christ for you.

Not just generically for people. For you. Christ went to the cross for you. If there was no one else in the entire world, He would have still gone to the cross for you.

Had his body broken for you. Had his body broken for you. Absolutely. Finally. Whatcha bet Fiore?