

Words of Encouragement: Called to Rule

“Let us make man in our image...and let them rule...over all the earth.” (Gen 1:26) It’s a breathtaking statement found in the opening verses of our Bible. Singling out these few key phrases makes the mammoth implications of the statement that much more vivid. All the earth? How could Adam and Eve and their progeny possibly rule over the whole thing? Somehow we tend to think of these words as an *invitation* to rule over creation rather than a commission to do so. Then when we come to the phrase “subdue the earth” a couple of verses later, our dull ears often hear it as a motivational speech rather than a prophetic decree by him who orders all of history.

Human beings are called to rule over this world. Some people consider this to be the height of evolutionary arrogance. Some relegate it to the stuff of fairy tales. Some think it noble but unattainable. Others deem it totally irrelevant. But God considered it to be the most valuable communication he could bring to his new image bearers. He spoke these words over them not in the fashion of some grand speech such as you would hear at a theme park, but as an authoritative declaration of his purpose and intention over creation. “Human beings will rule this world!”

We can see the evidence of this decree all around us. Cities, governments, nations, tribes—human history is full of examples of those who have ruled well and those who have ruled poorly. But how often do we think of *our* life circumstances as being part of this grand design? The concept of ruling over the whole earth is so big we can’t really conceive of it. Nevertheless, since God has decreed it to be so, one might anticipate that every aspect of life is shaped and intended toward that end. Hmm. (That’s today’s English for *Selah*.) God is seeing to it that this world *is* in fact ruled over and subdued by human beings—progressively and according to his own timeline; and at the same time he’s seeing to it that there are human beings fit to the task and able to perform it according to his divine intentions.

This all gives us a bit different perspective when we encounter life’s challenges. God may be using *us* to bring rule, to bring

government and order into circumstances or environments where it is needed. Schools, offices, jobsites, hospitals, homes, stores, restaurants, etc.—all of these need good order to thrive and fill their proper place in society. Whatever our job may be, it is fulfilling in some small measure that same word spoken in Genesis 1 to rule and subdue the earth—anyone who’s not on the couch all day is involved with shaping this world. Sometimes we wince at the obstacles we face, but that is really just part of the process. In fact, it points back to Genesis 3 where God declared that because of the fall into sin, productivity (forward progress) would now come with sweat and toil and pain. It is not that there would be no productivity, or no more rule over the earth—only that the process would now be marked by difficulty, resistance, and pain. We can truly say, “God said it would be like this.”

What is striking about the observations so far is that they are the common lot of all human beings. The commissioning words were to Adam and Eve who represent the entire human race, redeemed and unrepentant alike. But there is one more truth that we do well to observe before leaving the subject: For the redeemed it is not only the world that is being changed as we labor in this life, it is also we ourselves. Romans 8:28-29 tells us that God uses all things for our good, to conform us to the image of Christ. Hebrews 12 tells us that he disciplines us faithfully as sons—and Deuteronomy 8:1-10 provides a striking example of God using circumstances to do just that. Peter urges us repeatedly to persevere through trials for the perfecting of our character. The call to rule may be common to all human beings, but the confidence that any resistance that we face will only serve to mold us in righteousness is a biblical hope reserved only for the children of God. Those whom the Lord loves he disciplines (Heb 12:6).

What assurance and hope we have when beleaguered by life’s trials! First, whatever the odds against us, God is using us to change and transform this world, to rule and subdue it, fulfilling his divine decree. Second, for all who name the name of Christ, no matter what challenges arise, they can serve only to conform us all the more perfectly to the image of the Son. With Paul we must conclude, “in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer.” (Rom 8:37) And so we shall, for great is he who has promised.