Kingdom Life: Image Bearers

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Isaiah 45:1-7 Thus says
the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped,
to subdue nations before him
and to loose the belts of kings,
to open doors before him
that gates may not be closed:
2 "I will go before you
and level the exalted places,
I will break in pieces the doors of
bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
3 I will give you the treasures of
darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is I,
the Lord,
the God of Israel, who call you by
your name.
4 For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not
know me.
5 I am the Lord, and there is no
other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not
know me,
6 that people may know, from the
rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is
none besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no
other.
7 I form light and create darkness;
I make well-being and create
calamity;
I am the Lord, who does all these
things.

Matthew 22:15-21 15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus

said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21 They said,
“Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things
that are Caesar's, and **to God the things that are God's**.” 22 When they
heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

***20 And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”* – Matthew 22:20**

Likness, inscription, appearance… This is a fascinating discussion initiated by … of all people … the Pharisees who were seeking a way to shut him up. Because he was inscribing things into the world in powerful ways.

And make no mistake this subject of what it means to bear an image is more relevant today than perhaps any other time in history. This topic may not be what we want to talk about, but believe me you will not likely escape this conversation in the weeks and months and years to come. And you, as a part of God’s Kingdom… you have something to say!!

Because the connection that happens when human beings communicate is where God is most present. We are not just mechanical beings following algorithms of behavioral response. We are Spiritual beings. We bear a Spirit that is constantly producing emotions, and breakthroughs and convictions and life changing moments … connection… through our daily conversations. And as human beings, created in the image of God, our connections with one another are the place where God becomes real. We bear the image of God to one another. God is actively inscribing words others need - into your heart and mind -for the sake of others. You Bear the Image of God!

And at no time is this reality going to become more important. Because the next 10 years of our lives are going to be defined by something that will seem to have all the answers… but it cannot answer everything for one simple reason… its inability to be inscribed upon by God.

We just got back from the Annual gathering of leaders representing the 1,000 LCMC congregations united in our mission for Christ.

And believe it or not there was a workshop on Artificial Intelligence - AI.

Each generation is partly defined by the technological breakthrough they grew up with. For me it was the transition from latchkey children to this thing called email and the internet.

For my children it was the smartphone. There are sociological changes like the rise in anxiety and loneliness that can all be traced back to an announcement in 2010 by Bill Gates that the Ipod, the camera, and this trend called texting would all combine to one small device with constant connection to the internet – the smart phone.

For today's children it will be AI. They will never know a world where they can not only find the answers to any question, but have an automated agent who can do the simple task for them. We are switching from our devices prodding us to do things, to our devices waking us up in the morning telling us what they have already done for us.

And if you think the Smartphone changed the world in dramatic ways, just wait until we have a whole generation of

kids, teenagers, young adults and the industries that serve us shaped by AI agents.

I was impressed with the speaker. A member of a LCMC congregation in San Diago. He knew his stuff. He runs a consulting business for helping companies and teams adapt to AI in the workplace.

What stuck me most was the rapid pace that AI is advancing. Evidently, we are now at a crucial point where an AI agent can think at the level of a group of the most advanced minds in any given field talking to each other at speeds we cannot fathom. Most of the agents we interact with now are the intelligence of a college student. The agents, although not human, are smarter and have access to information no one individual or think tank can produce.

AI has now reached the place where it is not only smarter than us but it can imitate a human relationship so completely we will not be able to tell the difference between AI and a real human being.

We have reached the place where the only way to know if the person you are talking to is real is if you are actual in the room with them.

Think about that. All of our daily interactions that do not require a human being in front of us are now replaceable.

Which begs the question – what interactions in your daily life require a human being?

This is the reality we now face. As the experts in the church have thought this through and observed the implications, they are confident that for 10% of the population this will become

an advantage. They will use AI agents to hone their own skills at being human. And unfortunately, 90% of us will simply use AI to take over the grindy task of life that we don't enjoy doing.

The largest concern – to which the church has the answer – is the very real lose of human connection. It is not a matter of when but how many people will turn to AI to replace the actual human relationships provided by their family and community.

And as good as AI will be at replacing real human connections there is one thing it cannot do. It can not bear the image of God.

***[20] And Jesus (holding a Roman coin) said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"* – Matthew 22:20**

AI cannot be inscribed upon and given words of eternal life in real time… only the Spirit can give sus the words of eternal life. Words we take for granted every day. You are the product of every word inscribed upon your parents, teachers, coaches and friends that were given to you at specific times of learning and growing and becoming who you are.

When we as the human race take God out of that equation there is not telling what the result will be. What illusions of grandeur and privilege and self-justification that can be produced when a human being is cut off from actual human connection. When this happens, we will truly know what it means to be separated from God. The gnashing and grinding of teeth that comes from being cast into the outer darkness.

AI is not the devil… but it is only and only ever will be inscribed upon by us. It can not bear God's Spirit in the way you and I can.

Think about how relevant this discussion of 'image' and 'appearance' is for us today and take confidence in the way in which God uses each of us to shape His world. You are a part of a Kingdom that has never been so needed in the world. You bear the image of God!

Matthew Chapter 22:
15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" **How does it shape you? It can't it is just a human inscription.**

20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"

21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Whose likeness and inscription has been carved into your very being… by grandma and grandpa, mom and dad, every Sunday school lesson and moment of worship.

You bear the image – the likeness and inscription - of God.