

“Living in Eden”

Genesis 2:7-25

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When I was in sixth grade, I my best friend came from a pretty well-to-do family. He had a lot of cool toys, and other kids were jealous of him. Sometimes gave his toys away, too—G. I. Joes, B. B. guns, skateboards, and things like that. But there was just one problem—every time he gave something away, it was broken. His presents always had something wrong with them.

But God always gives good gifts, and everything he makes is good. This morning we're going to look at some of God's good gifts for us.

Last week we started a new series on Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The word comes from the Hebrew *bereshith*, the first word of the text, and it simply means “beginning.” That's because the first words of the book say, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Let me remind you of a couple things Genesis is not.

It's not a science textbook. Genesis tells the truth in what it portrays, but it wasn't concerned with presenting empirical data. Instead, it presents events in a way that made sense to its readers.

And it's not a history book in the normal way. It tells certain parts of history as it has to do with God and how he works through a particular family tree to reach out to the whole world, and how Jesus one day fulfills that great work.

Genesis doesn't tell just how creation took place. Instead, it tells *who* made the world, and *why* he did it, and what our place is in it. It tells us God created people to know him and enjoy him, and he made us to do his work in the world. It's the foundation for understanding God's plan that unfolds through the rest of the Bible.

Genesis chapter two talks about the gift of three different relationships we were made for.

First, Adam was created for a relationship with God.

Chapter two opens with the summary,

“So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work” (Genesis 2:1-2).

God didn't rest because he was exhausted from all his work. He rested so that he could enjoy a relationship with his creation, and especially with people, the high point of everything he made. That's why it says,

“And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation” (2:3).

That purpose to enjoy a relationship with God comes out in Exodus, when God gives the Ten Commandments to Moses. He says,

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

God tells *why* he orders this in verse 11:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; then he rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart” (20:11).

God gives us the opportunity to enjoy him, and it's the biggest gift of creation. That's what Jesus teaches us when he comments on the meaning of this command:

“The Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath. And I, the Son of Man, am master even of the Sabbath!” (Matthew 5:34).

Even the writer of Hebrews picks up that theme, and says,

“For this Good News—that God has prepared a place of rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them” (Hebrews 4:2).

In Christian theology we have an idea called “original sin,” and it means that in our world, we're all born with the capacity for evil. But before evil entered the world there was goodness, perfection, of original *blessing*.

That's where the forbidden tree comes in. It's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. How does that work?

Think of it like this. What would happen if nothing was off limits? If everything was permitted? It means that there'd be no place for Adam and Eve to exercise their wills, to decide anything meaningful. It means there'd be nothing they can choose to do to obey God. But with the tree in the center of the garden, they

suddenly became moral beings. Now they're capable of a relationship with God. That's a gift.

God says, I've given you the whole world, but one thing you need to steer clear of. It's nothing good or bad about the tree itself, it's simply the fact that to eat from its fruit is to run away from God. That's how all the sudden they'd come to know about evil. But every time Adam and Eve walked *by* that tree, they were trusting what God said, that he knew what he was talking about, and it was an act of worship.

We need significant choices, freedom to do the right thing. We need rules and guidance, not just to protect us against evil, but also in order to show we're responsible, moral beings. Why would God put a tree in the garden and then tell Adam and Eve not to eat from it? God wanted them to obey, but God gave them the freedom to choose. Without choice, they would have been prisoners, and their devotion would've been hollow. The forbidden tree meant Adam and Eve had to choose the good, in choosing God. Because they were created for a relationship with him.

Second, God created Adam for a relationship with the garden.

God wants us to have a purpose bigger than ourselves. And so he gives the garden, and he tells Adam to till the earth and take care of it.

I'm thinking here about our relationship with work. The word "paradise" comes from the Persian word for garden. Our world longs for the garden, for "paradise restored," for Eden. It's interesting that God included work in the garden, the place of original blessing.

See, a lot of people think of work as more of a curse than a blessing, a necessary evil, something that wears you down, and maybe eventually kills you. But God sees it as something else, an expression of our humanity, because it's a way of being like God who worked to make creation. God expresses his purposes to create through us as we share with him in caring for, of cultivating the earth. Work isn't supposed to be just a nasty thing you have to do to survive, but a way of honoring God and him honoring us.

That's what we mean in our Reformed tradition of "vocation," a word that means "calling." When you see your life and work as a calling, a special mission, it changes everything.

It's like when the stonecutters of the great European cathedrals did their work, they saw it as a holy calling, just as important as what the priests did. That's why they carved so beautifully, even a gargoyle or a spire one hundred feet up and on the backside of a tower where no one would see it. Because even if people couldn't see it, God would.

It gave purpose to their work, and even a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. God wants us to have meaningful work, even if all you can do is pray. (In fact, that's the most significant work of all.) So don't give up, because you never retire from serving God, because it's how he's programmed us to be, and just like holy rest, holy work is a part of what makes us like God, and makes us fully human. God made us to share in his work in the world.

Third, God created Adam for a relationship with the woman.

Notice that the creation story is told a second time.

The first time, in chapter one, God makes everything by just saying "Let there be," and it comes to be out of nothing. God simply calls things into being, and what he wants happens.

In chapter two, the story's told a second time, from a different angle, using a different picture. This time, God uses material. When he makes man, he scoops dirt out of the ground, like he's making a little clay man, and he breaths his spirit into him. Then when he makes a fitting partner for the man, the woman, he makes the man fall into a deep sleep, and takes a rib from man, makes the woman out of that. Adam is complemented by Eve. One without the other is incomplete.

We could say a lot of how God makes complementary beings for one another, to give each other help and strength and joy. God's creative work wasn't done until he made woman. He could've made her out of the earth like he did Adam, but he makes her from the man's flesh and bone. That shows that in marriage a man and woman are symbolically united into one, a union of hearts and lives. He doesn't make two identical beings, and he doesn't make two completely different species. He designed man for woman to complete each other. That's why Paul writes to the Ephesians,

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord...In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies...This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:21-22, 28, 32-33).

Now, I am not saying that if you are single, you're less of a person, or that you less fully reflect the image of God. We know that because of the way Paul honors singleness, and lifts it up as a noble option for devoting yourself fully to the service of God. What I'm saying is that marriage is a particular blessing of God, that it's the image of the union between Christ and his church. By

extension, we can see we're made for relationship with others. All of us, married or single or widowed, need each other.

God says that marriage is the foundation for all human society. And the bigger principle is that we all need each other to be complete. If you're single, look for others in the Christian family you can get to know, to support, to be known. We need each other, and it's a gift from God.

So, you could sum it up this way. God gave Adam work, Woman, and worship. In the same way, God gives us the gift of relationship with God, a garden, and a good friend.

Our work in this world can often seem futile.

But our work finds its true meaning in light of the work of Jesus, who laid down his life for us, who gives us a calling that will make a difference in eternity.

Our relationships in this world can often be broken and hurting.

But our marriages find their deep meaning in the mystery of Christ and the church, and our friendships have the possibility of real purpose and joy as we share and serve together in the church.

Our worship finds its true object in God, revealed in Jesus Christ.

We're created in the image of God, but often that image is messed up in us. The disconnect between what we are and what we're supposed to be only finds its solution in New Testament faith. In the same way, Genesis makes clear we were made for a relationship with God, but that relationship is only made possible in Jesus Christ, who laid down his life to pay for the burden of our wrongdoing, because he died so he wouldn't have to lose us.

What does that mean for us today? I see at least a couple things.

First, what's the priority of worship in your life?

You're here in worship this morning, so I think you've seen something of God you like, and you want to know him more. A lot of things make a claim on our lives, but only God can satisfy. I encourage you to take some time not just on Sunday, but everyday, and worship God. Maybe by reading the Bible for fifteen minutes to start your day, or by taking some time for quiet and solitude before going to bed at night. Maybe it's in your car as you commute; put on some worship songs and sing to God, and turn your car into a sanctuary of God's presence.

Second, acknowledge Jesus as the fullness of God.

Without Jesus, God can seem like an abstraction, but Jesus tells us, “Anyone who has seen me has *seen* the Father” (John 14:9). Like Paul says,

“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together” (Colossians 1:15-17).

He goes on to say,

“As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a fault” (1:22).

That sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? So if you don’t know Jesus personally, I invite you to try him out. Take him at his word. Read the Bible, and if you here him speaking to you in its pages, do what he says. See the difference he makes. And if you do know him, take another step of faith, and go deeper in him.