

Genesis 2:4-25

Part One

We are continuing this morning with our study of Genesis, picking up at verse 4 of chapter 2 and working to the end, taking what will be the first of two looks at this chapter. This morning we will look at the chapter as a whole and in the next study, two weeks from now, I hope to concentrate on verses 18-25. Now, thus far in our study we have had some introductory reflections on the book of Genesis, and then we have taken two weeks to think about the opening prologue of 1:1-2:3. In looking at the prologue we have seen that it is a highly structured, thematically driven account which serves as a very memorable, portable, and even poetic overview of God's great work in creation.

In the passage before us this morning we are moving past the prologue into a section which has both similarities and differences with the opening account of Genesis 1. In terms of their similarities, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are both accounts which show and describe the creative work of God the Father. Likewise, they both emphasize, in their own way, the fact that humankind is the centerpiece of that creative work.

But there are differences between the accounts as well. For instance, Genesis 1 is showing a more complete picture of creation - from the very beginning - while Genesis 2 seems to be picking up the account with the story already "in progress" - with the earth, and the moon and stars and the oceans and the dry land already in place. Further, Genesis 2 seems to be especially interested in only certain aspects of the opening account- namely the creation of vegetation, the formation of a special place for the people to live, the creation and naming of animals, and a more detailed accounting of how God made both male and female persons.

There are also differences with regard to some of the details in the passages. For example, in Genesis 1, you have the creation of plants and trees to cover the earth, on day 3, *before* the creation of the man and the woman, on day 6. In Genesis 2:5-7, however, you have the creation of the man *before* the plants and trees, with the creation of the woman coming after all of that. In Genesis 1, you have the creation of the animals on Day 6, before the creation of humans, but in Genesis 2:18-19, you have the creation of animals *after* the creation of the man, and *before* the creation of the woman. In Genesis 1, you have the creation of birds on Day 5 and the animals on Day 6 whereas in Genesis 2 you have the creation of birds and animals at the same time (see 2:18-20). And there are other differences as well. But the point is - there are differences that have sent God's people searching for a way to understand how these chapters relate to one another.

Now, before you get too worried, let me just remind you that all of this is nothing new. These matters have been discussed and hypothesized about for quite some time in the church. And these two passages have, historically, been approached and accounted for in various ways by different bible scholars. Within the circles of those scholars from our own tradition, and who hold to the complete authority and reliability of the Bible, these different approaches can be boiled down to essentially two that are really worth considering. One of these I have already hinted at in a previous sermon, but for the sake of clarity, let me just briefly state them both for you now.

The first approach that has been taken is one which we will call the *traditional view*. And this approach, simply put, says that the apparent differences between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are just that, *apparent*. When you look at them more closely, the differences can be explained or, at the very least, minimized. So, for example, in this view scholars take the position that the reference to "days" in Genesis 1 is intending to mean a 24 hour period of time and that the sequence of creation presented there is intended to be understood as a chronological sequence. As a result, when you get to something like Genesis 2:5-9, which seems to be describing a different order of things - humans before vegetation - many scholars take the view that this is only describing the sequence of events *in the garden of Eden*, and not the sequence for creation *as a whole*, which was established earlier in Genesis 1.

These same scholars then proceed, in a similar fashion, to explain the other apparent discrepancies, both within Genesis 1 itself and between Genesis 1 and 2, by looking very closely at the original language - Hebrew - and pointing out subtle distinctions that are not immediately apparent in the English translation, but which may account for the discrepancies. A scholar by the name of John Currid does a good job of this and is on the faculty at RTS Jackson.

Over against that approach is another main one which we will call the *framework view*. And in this approach, simply put, the view is that, while God certainly could have created the world in six 24 hour days, and in the exact sequence described in Genesis 1, the reality is that when we read Genesis 1 in that fashion, we are actually reading it in a way that it was never intended to be read. We are drawing conclusions from it that we were never meant to draw by taking a thematic, obviously highly structured, and somewhat poetic account and forcing a kind of modernistic, scientific overlay upon it - one that would have been foreign to the thinking and intention of the writer of Genesis.

You may remember me using the example of the rhyme: "Thirty days, hath September, April, June, and November, all the rest have 31 except February...." and I forget how it ends. You see, if, after my mother taught me that rhyme, I were to walk away saying to myself, "Right, so what my mother was telling me was that the order of the months goes like this: First comes September, followed by April, then June, then November and finally is February" - if I were to walk away thinking that, then I would be mis-understanding and mis-using this rhyme my mother had taught me - which was for different reasons and different purposes, a rhyme which foregoes chronological sequence, in order to become a useful way of remembering other truths about the months of the year.

In a similar fashion, if the purpose of the Genesis prologue was to communicate the perfection of God's creation, the superiority and uniqueness of God over against other false gods, and the wisdom and breadth of his creation - and not to provide a strictly scientific/chronological portrait - then we misread the prologue when we force it into that mold. A scholar who does a good job of explaining and describing this sort of "framework" view is Mark Futato, who is also on the faculty of RTS, but in Orlando.

Now, I'm not going to go into all the various ways these differing scholars demonstrate and explain their position over against the other one. But I will tell you that both of these approaches share some common convictions and goals.

Scholars in both of these camps would defend to the death the essential historical nature of Genesis 1 and 2 - that both of these accounts - from whatever perspective you view them - are conveying essential, undeniable historical realities which are affirmed later on in Scripture.

These realities include the conviction that the universe is a creation and not an accident, that God is the unique and all-powerful and ever-present cause of that creation, that human beings did not just appear as the result of a random, evolutionary process but are a deliberate creative work of God, that people are unique from animals because they alone bear the image of God, that Adam and Eve are not mythical names of imaginary people but real names of real people who lived in a real garden and fulfilled a specific role in the history of God's purposes here on earth.

Reformed, Evangelical scholars from both traditional and framework perspectives affirm these things because both hold to the absolute authority and reliability and accuracy of the Scriptures - where they differ is in *how* these two chapters work together not on *whether* they work together.

And this needs to be highlighted here. Because one of the things that keeps scholars in both camps working to clarify what is going on in Genesis 1 and 2, is something which seems, perhaps, to be a rather *simple* fact but which may prove to be the most profound fact of all: the fact that these two passages *do appear* side by side, back to back.

Now, again, this may seem fairly un-important but it is actually *very* significant. In other words, we have here two accounts of the creation, from different perspectives and with differing emphases - and yet the author - who would have understood and seen these things better than we can - apparently had no problem with them and has them just as they are, one right after the other. He apparently saw or felt

no tension between them. He saw no reason to try and edit one chapter so that it fit more smoothly with the next. He saw no reason to try and blend the two into one account that was a more complex and harmonious whole. He has written them as they are, and placed them just as he has and this fact *speaks volumes* and forces us to wrestle with these texts until we get to the same place of understanding of how they work together in a way that matches the original author's understanding.

My own view is that the framework approach is more helpful in this regard. I believe it does a better job of answering the questions raised, is more consistent in how it handles texts and fits better with the overall structure of Genesis. At the same time, I have very good friends, some of them much smarter than me, who would make the same statements about the traditional view. We both agree that the passages are consistent with one another - we just don't agree on how that consistency is displayed. And I might just add that, if you want to look at this further on your own, look up the PCA web site, click on "Administrative Committee" and on "Historical Center" and in there you will find a complete collection of the PCA's position papers on all kinds of issues, including this one.

All of that has been, admittedly, an extended detour or "side road". But an important one. Let's take the remainder of our time this morning to concentrate on the "main road" to see what are some of the core truths that await us within this very important passage. Before we do that, let's pray together. (Pray and read text, 2:4-25)

After the sweeping account of the creation of all things presented in the prologue, Genesis 2:4ff narrows our gaze and gets us to focus again on creation, but this time as it specifically relates to the human beings who are at the center of God's creative work. And looking at this section as a whole, we see that *from the very beginning, it was the Creator's desire, in his great generosity and kindness, to live in relationship with people who are in His image, in the midst of a beautiful and abundant world created for His and their, enjoyment.*

The picture painted here, while brief, is still the picture of a perfect world, of a great and beautiful world, a world brimming with life and abundance. And there, in the midst of that world, managing it and looking after it are two people who perfectly reflect the image of their Creator, who live in complete harmony with God, with each other, with all the other creatures, and with the creation itself - with the world that God has prepared for them. It is a truly idyllic scene - a snapshot, if you will, of the Kingdom of God functioning as it was intended: with *God's people, in God's place, under God's kind and benevolent rule.*

In highlighting these things, writer of Genesis is giving us a picture of what *was* and is, therefore, paving the way for us to understand, later on, *what was lost*. He is helping us to gain some sense of how very far was the fall. To put it another way, Genesis 2 is the bright backdrop which helps us to see the darkness of Genesis 3 for what it truly is.

Having said that then, let's take a look at a few elements within this passage which illustrate these things in some particular ways, showing the goodness and generosity of God, and the greatness and bounty of His creation, and so sets us up for the account which follows.

- 1) One of the first illustrations of the goodness and generosity of God is seen in verses 2:5-7 and in the simple fact that God, out of sheer grace and kindness, and not out of any deficiency or lack in himself, condescended to create a world

and place in that world human beings, endowed with his image and animated with the breath of life.

Now we looked at what it means to be in the image of God, last week, but what I want you to see this morning in this re-telling of the creation of man is the truth that the Creator God is *the giver of life*, and that this is one of the defining characteristics of God. And, as such, it should come as no surprise to us to see that this same characteristic can be found when we flip to the other end of the Bible, and look at the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

In 1 Corinthians 15, in a passage where Paul is defending and explaining the resurrection of Christ, and what it all means, he connects the ministry of Christ very explicitly with the events of Genesis 2:

Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam (Paul's term for Jesus here) became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul is deliberately drawing on the imagery of Genesis 2, with the Creator God as the Giver of Life, and showing how the Lord Jesus Christ is that same life-giving spirit. Just as the first man was given the breath of life and was endowed with natural life from the Creator, and became a procreator of natural life, so is Jesus - the last Adam - endowed with life and is also the source of life to others - not mere natural life but rather spiritual life, eternal life. He became, in Paul's words "a life giving spirit" - the source and originator of all spiritual life and thus the guarantor that all those are in him are in possession of eternal life and have only to look at the Lord Jesus Christ to know what their own future and hope is beyond the grave (see also John 20:22). So we see in Genesis 2 God as the Giver of Life and the NT echo of that in Jesus, the life-giving Spirit

2). In addition to giving humans the breath of life, we see in 2:8-10, the graciousness of God in the way he so abundantly provided for the physical or material needs of his people. God, after creating the man, then takes him to a place especially created for him - a garden - and in that garden causes to sprout up all sorts of lovely trees and plants that would be sources of food for the people he has created. But not only are they sources of food - they are sources of beauty and aesthetic delight. The text says that God provided not just a FEW trees, but EVERY tree that was PLEASANT TO THE SIGHT and GOOD FOR FOOD. In short, we see here the lavish, abundant provision of God. A God who does not just give the bare essentials so that his creatures can scrape by, but instead pulls out all the stops, spares no expense, goes to great lengths to create this amazing garden which was as pleasing to the *eyes* as it was to the *palate*.

And, just as before, the image here of God as the source and provider of all good things for his people, is one which is traceable from this point forward until we see it fully evident in the NT in the Lord Jesus Christ as well. We see a further illustration of God's provision for his people in the account of the manna which was provided for them, in spite of their sin, and in the midst of a barren wasteland. We see it further on as God, through Moses, leads his people through that wasteland up to a Land of Promise - an abundant land described as "flowing with milk and honey". We see it in Jesus' earthly ministry - launched in a miraculous way while He was attending a feast, turning water into wine, and then later on turning a child's sack lunch into a meal for thousands, with armloads to spare.

We see it still further, not only in Jesus works but in his *words* as he says to the people that He is the *bread from heaven*, that he is the "food" that will satisfy their souls, that he is the "water" that will quench their thirst, that he came that his sheep might "have life and have it abundantly". This same Jesus then assures all those that are his that theirs is the hope and kingdom of heaven. And when we, with John, pull back the veil of heaven just a bit in Revelation 22, we find, in admittedly picturesque language, that we have come full circle. There, in the City of God, the "New Jerusalem", in the midst of that city stands once again the Tree of Life, with its twelve kinds of fruit - open and eternally accessible for the citizens of the heavenly kingdom to enjoy.

3) In addition to the gracious gifts of life and beauty and abundance, we see as well in Genesis 2 verses which speak of other ways in which God provided for his people in their perfect world. In vs 15 we see that God gave the man WORK - meaningful labor, a significant task and purpose which provided the man with valuable and useful service that he might perform for the glory and pleasure of the Creator. We can also see, later on in the chapter from verse 18 forward, that in addition to work, God also provided companionship for the man, fashioning a woman who also bore the Creator's image, to live in relationship with him, and with her Creator, to work alongside the man in the perfection of the garden. Both of these - WORK and MARRIAGE - are things which could be explored further - and one of them we will in a couple weeks - and which demonstrate further the goodness and generosity of God and the beauty of a creation where *everything is as everything is supposed to be*.

4) And so, while both of those are things which we could explore further, in the interest of time this morning we will move on in order to focus on the last thing I want you to see in this passage - which is also a demonstration of the goodness of God - and which is really one of the most significant things being said in the verses before us this morning: the provision of the two special trees and the instructions regarding one of them. (Read vs 9 and verses 15-17). Now, what's going on with the trees, and with this one tree - the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - in particular? What does that all mean?

Well, simply put, the trees are *God's Billboard*. Placed in the midst of the garden, much like a billboard is placed in a prominent position beside a main road, and with a similar sort of purpose, to tell you something you need to know, to remind you of something that you are never, never, never to forget. What is it that God's creature - this man - is never to forget? *That there is a God, and it is not him*.

How does the tree communicate this? Because every time the man sees it, he remembers that out of all the lush and beautiful things God has provided in the garden that there is this one thing - that is also lush and beautiful - but which is out of bounds for him. And as he remembers *that* it is out of bounds he remembers *why* it is out of bounds: *because God said so*. Even paradise cannot exist without boundaries, without reminders of who is the Creator, and who is the creature.

And understanding this reality, helps us to understand the meaning of the *name* of this particular tree - "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil". It was not called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because, when you ate of it, you

suddenly became aware, for the first time, that things like “good” and “evil” exist. The man would have known that, indeed, *must* have know it, at least to a certain extent. He would have known at least this: that leaving the tree alone was good and taking from the tree was forbidden, and therefore bad or evil. He must have known at least that or God’s instructions to him would make no sense.

So, what is this “knowledge of good and evil” which the serpent, in Genesis 3:5, during his temptation, *quite rightly* says will make the man and the woman like God in a way which they are currently *not* like him? Well, it’s this: Up to this point, their knowledge of good and evil is all from the side of the rule-keeper - as those who know good and evil by it being pointed out to them. That sort of knowledge is permitted to them, and even necessary for them.

But what is not permitted for them, what is forbidden to them, is the knowledge of good and evil, not as a rule-keeper, but as a *rule-maker*. What is out of bounds for them is, as Hamilton puts it, “the power to decide for themselves what is in their best interests or not”. If the man was to discard God’s instructions, and take the fruit, he would be attempting to know good and evil in another way - by making himself the moral center of the universe - i.e., by making himself the one who *defines* what is good and evil, by his own choices and decisions.

But as long as the man and woman are in the garden, there are certain things, certain kinds of knowledge that they are NOT to seek, and NOT to possess. There are things that they *might* know, but are not *meant* to know. They were to be content in God’s provision, content in the understanding that amidst the amazing provision of God there was this one thing which was withheld from them.

And so we see, from the very beginning, in the midst of this paradise, that man finds his truest self and best self, living under the benevolent and kind authority of God - even when that authority consists of only one thing. And notice here that this law of God, this prohibition of God, comes to the man, not AS the basis of his relationship with the Creator, but ON the basis of his relationship with the Creator. He was already a child of God by the sheer grace and mercy of God alone, in creating him. He was already the amazing beneficiary of the great generosity of God - and indeed, this will become the very point of testing, the very thing that is questioned in Genesis 3 by the serpent.

And as we take this reality and trace this line through the Scriptures, we arrive at Mt Sinai, with the people of God under Moses, receiving the commandments - again, not AS the basis for their relationship but ON the basis of their relationship with God. And the commandments perform, among other things, the same function as the one command in the garden - as this signpost that reminds the people of God that there is a God, and it is not them, and that life and peace awaited those who recognized God’s kind authority.

And yet they, as inheritors of Adam and Eve’s own fall, stumble, and they continue to stumble at this very point. And the question is raised, and continues to be raised throughout the remainder of the OT - will God’s people *ever* be able to live AS his people, recognizing his rightful rule and authority, and regain the paradise that was lost - the paradise of Genesis 2?

And the answer that comes, as we shall see in the next few weeks, is “yes” they will and indeed, “yes, they *have*” in and *through* the person and work of Jesus Christ who was the second Adam, the true and faithful Son, the true Israelite, who humbled himself, submitting to the authority of His Father, being obedient “even unto death” - as Philippians tells us.

Now, of course, the people in Moses’ day, the people of God who would have first received this account, would not and *could* not have known all these things, as they stood poised on *that* side of the cross, poised to take the land promised to them. But they would have certainly seen in this account the picture of the world as it was meant to be: God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s authority and rule. And they would have been encouraged that the same God who created a world like that and for that purpose was now leading them forward into a land which was to be, in a shadowy sort of sense, *something* like that - a land of rest and promise and abundance, a land where they

could be his people and he could be their God, a land where they would not have two trees but they would have two tablets - two tables of the law serving the same function, reminding them in various and particular ways, of who they were and of who God was.

And we, who stand on their shoulders, who see further than they could see, how much more should we be encouraged by these realities? We who live on the other side of the curse, to be sure, but who also live on *this side* of the cross - we can see how God has made a way to restore his fallen creatures and renew his fallen creation. We see how christ, who has gained the kingdom of heaven for us, is the leading edge of this great restoration of God's fractured cosmos. We can see that great hope which is before us and can rejoice with Paul, when he writes, in Romans 8:19ff,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.....