

Priests, Kings & Prophets

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- [0 : 01] So Genesis chapter 2. The book of Genesis is this book about origins. It's answering questions like, where did we come from? What went wrong?
- And how on earth are we going to make something out of this mess? And I said earlier, our passage in verses 4 to 25 of Genesis 2, it zooms back in on day 6 in creation.
- And it elaborates on what it means that man is made in God's image. That he's there to have dominion, to subdue the earth, to bring forth its fruitfulness.
- What does it mean to be a human being? And in our passage, actually, in chapter 1, God is just referred to as God, Elohim. And in verse 4, in here on out, it starts to refer to him as the Lord God.
- That's Yahweh Elohim. It's using his covenantal name. The transcendent God who created everything is also the near personal relational God of Israel.
- [1 : 01] So before we get into our passage, would you pray with me for the preaching of God's word? Father, we ask that by your spirit you'd speak clearly to us.
- That you'd give us a deep sense of who you are, who we are, and what that means for our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name.
- Amen. Amen. So back in the old days, if you were getting married, there'd be a dowry, right? If you're getting married, you'd also not just get a wife, you'd get like a herd of goats and a bag of coins or something like that.
- When I was getting married, the thing to do, you know, in order people would want to give you gifts to help you establish you in this new life as a married couple, the thing to do would be to go and register at a store in America called Bed, Bath, and Beyond.
- You need some bedding, you need some stuff for the bathroom, and things for Beyond, right? So it's 17-ish years ago. Aaron and I are engaged, and we are at the Bed, Bath, and Beyond in Gainesville, Florida, registering for things.
- [2 : 11] And we're walking through. We have this cool little gun thing. I got to scan things. I felt like a cowboy, just kind of shooting them. And we're going through, and we get to the kitchen section. And I remember Aaron grabs off the wall a microplane zester grater.
- And I looked at it, and I just quickly said, well, we don't need that. Just put it back. And she said to me, oh, no, yes, yes, we do need this. We'd use it all the time.
- To which I said, we would not use it all the time. I don't even know what that is. Here is the microplane zester grater that we registered for a little over 17 years ago from Bed, Bath, and Beyond.
- And guess what? We use it all the time. You need a little lemon zest on top of something, a little Parmesan. This is the perfect thing for it, a microplane zester grater.
- You can all have a turn holding it later. Maybe you have your own. I don't know. I tell that story to make a simple point that it helps to know the purpose of something before talking about its usefulness.

- [3 : 26] It's good to know the goal if you're going to talk about something's necessity. We don't need that. I don't know what it is. Therefore, we don't need it. Clearly, I've made it my whole life without that thing, so it's not necessary.
- I had no idea what it was. Here's the thing. Lots of us struggle to know if we're useful, if we're necessary, if our lives are necessary.
- And so, for many of us, our life kind of becomes this monotonous rhythm of, like, work and talking about weather and eating food and dieting or just talking about dieting and maybe some tea and Netflix thrown in.
- And the result is that we can be like 21-year-old Nate looking at a microplane zester. What is my life? What is it for?
- Is it even necessary? Is it even necessary? Is it even necessary? Is it even necessary? Genesis 2 is answering that sort of a question. If your life was a microplane zester grater, it would be tragic if you left it in the drawer.
- [4 : 31] Also, it would be pretty harmful and things would go awry if you used it in the wrong way. Like, this is a terrible sword. You would lose all your sword duels if you were trying to use this as a sword.
- But if you know what it's for, then we're cooking. Then you can actually talk about it and know the purpose and maybe find some joy in it. In our passage, what I want us to see is that humanity is created as priests, kings, and prophets.
- See, the imagery of those three things in our passage is kind of analogously, but it's there in our passage. And that's our outline, okay? What's your life all about? What were you created for? To be a priest, to be a king, to be a prophet, okay?
- So first thing is priests. I'm sorry if you were here this tonight and you were hoping I would have a map of precisely where the Garden of Eden is. I do not have that.
- Instead, what I want to point you to is temple imagery in our text, okay? We zoom in on day six and we ask, what kind of world is God building?
- [5 : 40] And the answer that Genesis 2 gives us is God is building a garden temple. That's what God is building.
- Or what they would say before the temple was built in the Old Testament, there was a tabernacle, right? That's where the place of the tent of meeting, where they would worship as they wandered in the wilderness. One of the best commentators on the book of Genesis is this British guy named Gordon Wenham.
- And he writes this. He says this. The Garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary.
- That is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple.
- These parallels suggest that the garden itself is to be understood as a sort of sanctuary. And you're like, you're just making that up, right? That's not it. No, look at the text.
- [6 : 41] It's in there. Just as the temple in the Old Testament was the unique place where God dwells, that's what we see in the Garden of Eden. God is everywhere, right?
- He's omnipresent, but also his special presence is there in the garden. It's outside of our passage, but in Genesis chapter 3, it talks about how God would come and he would walk with man and woman in the garden.
- Well, it's the same little Hebrew phrase. I think it's hit to lake. Walk that's used in Leviticus 26 when he talks about the tabernacle. I will make my dwelling.

Literally, I will make my tabernacle among you and I will walk among you. It's the same phrase, the same word that's being used for God walking in the temple as he walks with Adam and Eve in the garden.

Not only that, the Garden of Eden, you enter it from the east in verse 8, right? And it's guarded by cherubim with a flaming sword after sin enters into the world.

[7 : 42] What's in the center of the temple in the Holy of Holies? The Ark of the Covenant covered by cherubim, right? The tree of life is in the Garden of Eden in verse 9 and lots of commentators point out that the menorah, the lampstand, right?

Is like a tree in the temple. Verse 11 and 12, we mentioned this last week and I know you were waiting. It was just a cliffhanger about temple imagery and you were waiting for me to explain more.

But it mentions gold and onyx. Well, those things were used in the building of the temple, right? And gold especially in priestly garments. The temple, when it's built in 1 Kings chapter 6, it's all these wood carvings of palm trees and pomegranates and things like that.

And it reminds you of a garden. Not only that, but in verse 15 it says, why is man put in the garden? And it says, man was put there to work and keep it.

Okay? Okay? Those verbs, work and keep, they happen many times throughout the Old Testament scriptures. But every time that they're used together, work and keep, do you know what it refers to?

[8 : 52] The priest's work. Numbers 3, Numbers 8, Numbers 18. They were the ones who were there to serve and work in the temple and to guard the temple as God's place of worship.

So what we see is that the temple, the temple in the Old Testament, it's all about how can earth and heaven join together. In the Old Testament, before sin enters the world, it's in the Garden of Eden.

That is God dwelling with his people. Right? And so the priests, they had access. Right? They got to mediate God's presence to his people. Something that we used to just have, but sin entered the picture.

Right? So the question throughout the rest of the Old Testament is, how does a holy God live with the sinful people? The temple. Priests to work. You need his access, his relationship, his face needs to be mediated.

That's what you had priests for. Okay. So in the Old Testament, priests, they had a very specific role. But you know what it refers to in Exodus 19 to all of God's people? A kingdom of priests.

[9 : 58] Right? That's what Martin Luther, many different places, but he talks about the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. There's a specific role of priest, just like there's a specific role of elder in the church.

But also there is an aspect to every person who follows Jesus being a priest. And you're like, great. Cool, Nate. That sounds great.

You connected all of those things. And we could say a lot about priestly work. But you want to know, how does this apply to my life? My microplane zester of a life, what does it mean for me to know that it's priestly?

I'm going to make three connections for us. First thing, priests guarded and gave access to the sacred space of the temple. Just like Adam and Eve were put in the garden in verse 15 to work and keep it.

So humanity's work is priestly in nature. They're not just gardeners. They're also guardians. And this, then, is where they fail. What happens in Genesis 3?

[11 : 00] They're supposed to be there as guardians to work and keep the garden. And what slithers in? The serpent. What should they have done as priests?

When the serpent comes in and starts spreading lies and getting them to doubt God's goodness, they should have stomped on its head. Crushed that serpent's head when it first came in.

They failed in their task as priests. What does it mean for you? Well, for one, you were created to enjoy communion with God. A relationship with him.

That's what you're created for. It's something that's deep down in us. And if you don't desire that, my simple question is, why not? Why not?

Is it possible that just like Adam, you let the serpent and his lies into the garden of your life? And you're listening to these lies of the serpent in your heart.

[11 : 59] Maybe a lie like, God doesn't really want to dwell with a person like you. Or God, he's like small and boring and only cares if you use bad words, right?

That's about the extent of it. And we refuse to stomp on the head of these lies because we forget our role as priests. God desires to walk with you in every single area of your life.

The huge things, the little things. The monumental heart-thumping things and the mundane things. Whether you're driving on the M8 or changing a nappy.

God desires to dwell with you. To be present with you. Second thing that priests did though, they also mediated God's blessing. So in number six, there's the Aaronic blessing.

Sometimes at the end of our worship services, we say that. May the Lord bless you and keep you, make his face to shine upon you. The priest is coming out and they're speaking God's blessing over his people.

[12 : 58] God's blessings come to them and they're speaking it over God's people. They're speaking a benediction over them. And if you remember in Genesis chapter one, what has God been speaking over his creation?

A benediction. Every single time after he makes something, it is, oh, it's good. Oh, it's good. It's so good. And then humanity then, the idea is that they are to continue to speak this blessing over creation in their work.

And so here's my question. Where in your life are you trying to find blessing? What's the voice that you're listening to telling you that you're okay?

You know, the horror of sin is to be removed from God's presence and to not know his blessing. And what you see, what sin really is, is we're going from thing to thing to try to get that blessing again.

To find out if we're good. And people are knocking on the door of sex and money and power, hoping that that's the door back into the Garden of Eden. Back into the place where we knew who we were.

[14 : 09] Where we knew that we were loved and rejoiced over. You know, if your life is a microplane zester grater and you're trying to be a can opener, it's not going to go well.

You're going to make a mess of things and you're going to hurt yourself in the process. Did you notice, we talked about God speaking his blessing over things. What's the first thing that God said isn't good?

Verse 18 of chapter 2. It's not good for man to be alone. We're not just created for a relationship with God, but for a relationship with other people.

And you can apply this very directly to the goodness of marriage. But also, I think at its base, we just see the need for community. You were created in such a way that you could be in all of this perfect garden.

And if you were by yourself, God would say, it's not good. It's not good. And when Adam sees what kind of a helper God makes for him, what does he say?

[15 : 15] Oh, this is good, right? This is good. He speaks of benediction over Eve. This is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. He's quoting poetry to her. So let me ask you.

Where are you speaking words of blessing over others? Where is that happening? Do your kids know this blessing? Does your spouse?

Your friends? Some of us don't know how to give it because we've actually never received it. And we're walking around with wounds from bad priests in our life.

Whether that's literal spiritual abuse, parental negligence, or betrayal by a friend. Words that get spoken in hate or words that get withheld in apathy.

And the good news of the gospel is that you can actually find that healing in the gospel and in the community that it creates. A kingdom of priests.

[16 : 17] And if you think that speaking words of blessing over people is just like kind of silly, just feeding people's insecurities, like we're too positive about things.

Sure, we can be too, you know, you could exaggerate our words. Be too profuse with them, right? But I think if we kind of scoff at the need for other people to be affirmed and to be blessed, you don't know that you were created to be a priest.

Third thing, priests also led others in worship. You get to do this with all of your life. And it gets set apart in a special way on a Sunday. We come and when we worship, what are you doing?

You're beholding something bigger than you. The world tells you, you are the biggest thing there is. You're the cat's pajamas. You are the be-all, end-all.

You get to define things. And we come and we worship. And there's something way bigger than us that we get to behold. And what you get to do as a priest is to invite other people in that life of worship.

[17 : 24] You see, there's part of the idea of being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth. There's this idea that the Garden of Eden is supposed to get bigger.

Right? Its borders are to expand as man and woman fulfill their task of being these priests as God's people. Right? That the knowledge of the glory of God would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

That's still the goal. Sin's entered the picture. So you've got to account for that. But that's still the trajectory. And so let me make this as plain as possible. When you gather here to worship and invite others to do the same, that is a priestly work.

And you are living with the grain of creation. What's your life all about? You're a priest. Okay? Second thing. You're a king. You're a king. All right.

You said earlier, our passage is zooming in on the sixth day of what happened back at the end of chapter 1 in Genesis 1. And if you were to look back there and remember from however many weeks ago it was, we talked about humanity being created in God's image.

[18 : 36] That's verses 26 and 27 of Genesis chapter 1. And that idea of being created in God's image, what we said was, that's actually a thing that gets talked about.

It's huge because there will be lot!

be referred to as an icon, an image of the God. And the Bible story of the world completely subverts that and says, uh-uh. It's every single person, man and woman, right, grown up and child is created in the image of God. They're created to represent God, and they're crowned with dignity, right? It's not just the elite, it's every single person. It's like if you've read C.S. Lewis's the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe. When the two brothers and the two sisters, Peter and Susan and Edmund and Lucy, go into Narnia for the first time, all these animals who can talk are asking them, are you sons of Adam and daughters of Eve? What does that mean? They're asking, are you a person?

Are you a human? And the way that evil gets rid of in Narnia, it's not just Aslan coming back, but there's this prophecy that when the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve sit on the four thrones of Caer-Perevel, things will be restored. Things will be put back right. It's like C.S. Lewis knows the story of the Bible, right? The idea is not just God being in charge, but God being in charge and restoring his people to their role as kings and queens in creation. So look at what Adam is doing in verses 19 to 20. What's he doing? He's naming all the animals. To name something in the Old Testament is to have authority over it. To demonstrate your authority, you demonstrate it by naming it. So Adam, he's exercising his dominion by naming things, bearing the image of God, humanity is to represent God's authority and rule. That's the kingly nature of what we're created to be. And later in the Bible, when Israel gets all these kings, one of the roles of the king is they are to be the ideal Israelite. So what's said about King David should have been said about all the kings.

That's a man after God's own heart. Meaning what? They are representing and they are ruling and they are stewarding the authority that God has given them. They are representing God's character and his care for his people and for his creation. So Psalm 72, give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. Why?

[21 : 37] That's the way God is. May he defend the cause of the poor, of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy and crush the oppressor. Why was the king to do all that? Because that is what God is like and that's what his rule is like. The dominion that we're given is a dominion that brings forth fruitfulness. Remember verse 5 of our passage, man's there to work the ground, to bring life from it.

Cool, okay, again, theological category, does this actually do something for my life this week? I think I could name 50 things. I'm just going to pick one though. Let me ask you, what has God given you authority over?

Don't be vague. Be very specific. Try to think of something. What has God given you authority over? It's no use to be like, oh, I have no authority. There's nothing. You know, it's just me. I'm just a servant. I'm poor. No, no, no, no, no. You have responsibility and agency, right? God's given you authority over different things. A family, financial resources, employees, possessions, abilities, church ministry. Things get messy when we either abdicate our authority, not going to do it, not going to step up, or if we abuse our authority, right? We want to be not servants of the true king. We want to be the king, capital T, capital K, right?

Again, the microplane zester greater. Such a good illustration, guys. It doesn't need to do more than it was created to do, but it also shouldn't do less. You don't need to say, oh, try to grab so much authority for yourself to make yourself proud and puffed up, but also, where is it? Where has God given you authority, right? We err if we don't respect the limits of our authority. You know, God's the one who names man, and then man names things, right? So God has authority over man, right? In this world, people are constantly, we're trying to name ourselves. We're trying to define ourselves. Say who we are.

Big thing, what's my identity? Who am I? Doesn't work that way. We also err, though, if we don't steward the agency that God's given us. So God's been working in creation, and then creates humanity to work, so therefore, don't be lazy. If he's given you authority over something, work heartily. Work hard, right? This passage calls you to do something with your life. It doesn't have to be glamorous or something that people see, and that image of gardening is good, too, because there's a process.

[24 : 31] There's a time to plant. There's a time to wait. It takes constancy in gardening, right, and doing the things that you need to do. Sometimes you have to get your hands dirty. All of those things happen.

Again, you're to be purposeful and persistent with what God's called you to steward, which is hard in an age of short attention spans and instant gratification. So Adam, in his kingly role, what is he supposed to have dominion over? The creatures. What comes in in Genesis 3 into the garden? A creature.

So that's not overturning things and Adam's kingly authority. If Adam was acting like a king, you know what he would have done? He would have stomped on that serpent's head. So you're created as priest, you're created as king's last things, you're created as a prophet. The word covenant isn't in the text that we read, but lots of theologians talk about all the elements of a covenant being in Genesis chapter 2.

There's this covenant between God and man. And a covenant, you can give lots of fancy definitions for it, but at its base, a covenant is a relationship that has promises and obligations within it.

There's blessings to fulfill it and there's a curse if you don't, right? A best analogy I can think of for modern people is marriage, right? It's a relationship and you take vows. Things go well when you keep those vows. When you break those vows, things fall apart, okay? And so again, the word covenant isn't in here, but Hosea 6-7, it refers to the covenant that Adam broke, right? So we're supposed to see a covenant in this passage. God is entering into covenant relationship with humanity, with Adam as the representative of humanity. And so then, there's a sense then, every single person who is created, you're either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker. And I said in a covenant, there's promises and obligations. But where's that in our passage? If you look at verses 16-17, God says to eat of every tree, but not which? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't eat of it, right? And you get to enjoy life as a priestly king. If you do eat of it, you break the covenant and you die. We can talk more about what that means in chapter 3. For now, I just want to point out that humanity, they were created in covenant to listen to God's word and to keep his covenant by listening to his word.

[27 : 08] And that was the role of a prophet. A lot of times you hear the word prophet, and what do you immediately think of? Somebody who tells the future, right? They did that too, but the vast majority of the time, what the prophets did was they enforced the covenant. There's a checks and balances between prophets, priests, and kings. They weren't supposed to do each other's job. And the prophet would get to come like the prophet Nathan did to King David and say, you are not acting like a king.

You're abusing your authority, and everything is going to go poorly if you don't repent, right? So a prophet, he enforced the covenant. He said, hey, listen, this is what God spoke. These are his words. These are his commands. You must heed them. And so as covenant enforcers, they call people back to living as the people of God. So Adam, he has this prophetic role to listen to God's word and to declare it to Eve and to the rest of creation. He's given this promise and these obligations, and he is supposed to enforce this for future generations to come, speaking God's word. And you know, the tragedy of sin is what happens when the serpent enters into the garden, it immediately twists what?

God's word. Tells half-truths. And as a prophet in the garden, what should Adam have done to enforce and to keep the covenant as soon as that serpent started telling lies and twisting God's truth? He should have stomped on its head. Part of your role as a human being is to listen to God's word and to follow it.

Follow it in faithfulness, wherever it leads, even into suffering, to speak out against things that are against God's ways. So we speak out, and what are some of the things that the prophets spoke out against? They spoke out against injustice. They spoke out against blasphemy. They spoke out against idolatry and exploitation.

You don't have to be annoying and hold a picket sign somewhere and do that, but we have this prophetic role in the world reminding people of who they are, who God is, and how he actually desires covenant relationship with them. And the prophets, as you go through the Bible, they speak words of confrontation, but they also speak words of consolation. You know, it's like, you can go up and announce, hey listen, to live that way, here's the word of confrontation. It's like taking a microplane zester and trying to shave with it. It's not going to go well. You're going to do harm to yourself.

[29 : 42] There's also a consolation that God desires relationship with you. He wants to tell you who you are. You want to know what your life is about. Is it necessary? What's it for? God wants to remind you of what that is. This temple imagery in Genesis 2 and all these rivers, it's not the end of that. In Ezekiel 47, there's a prophet Ezekiel, and he has this vision of the temple. And it starts as this like trickle of water. And it turns into this massive river that you can't even swim through and would engulf you.

And it's flowing out of the temple into all parts of this world. These parts of the world that wouldn't grow things otherwise, the waters going down and sustaining life. There's this consolation of living water that flows from the temple like in the rivers of the Garden of Eden.

All right, let me move to conclusion then. If you're in the church, you might know where I'm going. You're like, well, you're going to talk about Jesus because the Bible refers to him as our prophet, our priest, and our king. You see, in the Bible, what Paul refers to Jesus as is a second Adam, Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. And where the story starts in a garden about a tree, and humanity fails as prophet, priest, and king, the true prophet, priest, and king, the second Adam comes, and he's in the garden of Gethsemane. And God says, hey, obey me about the tree. And he says, not my will be done, but yours. And he goes to the tree, and he absorbs the covenant curses. Cursed is the one who hangs on a tree.

But you see, in doing this, the story gets repeated, but with a twist. Because even though he enters in, and he takes on death, that is the serpent bruising his heel, and he, as prophet, priest, and king, crushes the serpent's head. And so as our high priest, he intercedes on our behalf. He gives us access again to God in worship. He speaks a word of blessing over his people. As our king, he leads us and shows us what it's like to follow him and to be a true human being. And as our prophet, his word speaks to us and calls us to listen. In him, things get restored. He is the prophetic gardener, the priestly gardener, the kingly gardener, the one in his resurrection who's found in a garden and is mistaken for a gardener.

And maybe that's the best mistake ever. So, what's your life about? God's created you in a priestly work, in a kingly work, in a prophetic work. He has work for you to do, hard work, but work that he invites you into and blesses. And some of us in life, you know, we're bored to death, trying to figure out who you are, wondering if evil is going to triumph.

[32 : 49] Some are wondering if your mistakes are going to define you. Oh, that you would come to the second Adam, to the true prophet, the true priest, and the true king.

He wants to invite you into his life. Let's pray. Father, we do give you thanks for our Savior, Jesus, and what he does to restore us. Father, we pray that as a people that we would intercede on the behalf of others like a priest, that we would sacrifice for others like a priest, that we would show the world what it's like to know the living God like a priest does, and do this with humility. Father, we pray that we would understand our kingly role, that we wouldn't abdicate our authority, we wouldn't abuse it, but then in our relationships and with the things that you've given us, that we'd bring forth fruitfulness to your glory.

Father, we also pray that you would give us prophetic courage, Lord, to speak out against the ways of this world that harm others. Call them back to your word, Lord, not to do it with arrogance, Lord, to do it winsomely in a way to win people to Christ. But in all these things, Lord, we want to know and be united to our prophet, priest, and king. Would you help us in this?

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.