

Understanding who we are

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[0 : 00] These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground.

And a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The river flowed out of Eden to water the garden.

And there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed from the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good.

[1 : 09] Delium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria.

And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.

For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all the livestock and the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.

[2 : 18] And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.

And they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Well good morning, my name is Dave.

I'm one of the pastors here if you haven't met me before. I really hope you can stay for lunch after the service. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Father, I pray that you'll give us ears to hear what you say true rest is.

Lord, we're all longing for it. But I pray that you would help us to find it in yourself, in your son. And in his name I pray. Amen. Well you might not have this problem, but often when I go away on holiday I struggle to get the rest I've been craving.

[3 : 38] And I think it's because I have just such high expectations of everything going to my plan that I just really struggle to be content when I'm on holidays. I almost prefer to be working.

I am working. Yeah, this is a bit awkward now that I say that. I think that's all because I forget what rest is.

And because I forget what rest is, and that I can have it while working by the way, I keep thinking I can create rest myself.

Let me just give you a few examples. In our passage today, it raises two massive topics that we spend a lot of our time in life in.

Work and relationships, marriage. Now, let's just take work for a second. Pastor Tim Keller talks about the work behind the work.

[4 : 38] So there's an example in the movie Chariots of Fire. It tells the true story of two Olympic sprinters, Abrahams and Liddell.

Now, Abrahams is trying to prove himself. He says, I've got ten seconds to justify my existence. Do you hear the work behind the work?

He's not just sprinting. He's my value, my purpose. I've got ten seconds to prove it. But Liddell says, God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure.

Do you hear the difference? He already knows he's accepted. And so there isn't that work behind the running. He can actually rejoice.

But what about relationships and marriage? We want to be so intimate and close. But don't you find that you're afraid because those who know you best also have the power to harm you the most?

[5 : 45] They can tear you down in a way that strangers can't. I think our society today is settling for this transactional relationship because transaction keeps a safe distance.

Can you imagine being so at ease with another human being that you have zero fear that they're going to hurt or use you?

Could you imagine that? Zero fear of that. We crave that kind of intimacy, I think, if you're anything like me.

But our experience tells us it's dangerous to open up. And so we put up these walls to protect ourselves. So we're craving rest.

And we try and find it in work and marriage in particular. And Genesis 2 gives us a picture of what rest really is and where we can find it. Now, why do I say that?

[6 : 51] Why is Genesis 2 a picture of rest? Because it sounds like another creation account, a second creation account. Why do you need another account of how things were made? Now, I want to go into some of the detail here of how we interpret Genesis.

We use the same principles for interpreting Genesis as we do all the scripture. We analyze it in terms of the genre and who's speaking and to whom, what the purpose is.

So notice in chapter 1, the name of God is God, Elohim, which represents the sovereignty, the power of God. And then in chapter 2, the name of God is Yahweh, Elohim, the personal covenant-keeping name of God.

The focus changes. Chapter 1 is this panoramic view. We've got heaven and earth. And it goes from being in this chaotic condition to being ordered and blessed.

But then the focus in chapter 2, it zooms right in, not just on the earth, but one part of the earth on a place called Eden. And the spotlight is on Adam and Eve. The genre changes from poetic structure, the seven days, the rhythm.

[8 : 05] And God said it was so. There was evening and morning. And then in chapter 2, we've got narrative. We've got story. We've got a picture of a setting and God speaking and man speaking and acting.

Now, I'm not going to go into the detail, but this has led to huge debate that it's two different authors because they're so different. But there's no need to do that. Jesus himself says that God is the author of both chapters.

You can picture Moses writing this to the newly formed people of God on the brink of entering the promised land.

They are God's people being formed in God's covenant. They're on the edge of the promised land of blessing and they're called to live under his good rule. And that's exactly what we find in Genesis 2.

We find God's people in God's place of blessing under his good rule. The theological point of this section, chapter 2 is preparing us for chapter 3 and what's loss at the fall.

[9 : 13] At the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4, we see the spread of sin into family as Cain kills Abel and as society develops, so does sin and destruction.

What should have spread is what we find in chapter 2. It should have been God's people in God's place enjoying abundance with this high calling to live for him, enjoying his presence.

That's what should have spread, but what actually spreads is destruction. So if I've lost you, can you come back and let me just summarise.

What's the purpose of chapter 2? Why do we need a second creation account? Well, chapter 1 is this panoramic view that shows that God alone rules over his creation.

He alone. He is transcendent. He is above. And so he deserves all our allegiance and trust.

Chapter 2 zooms right in, showing us that God is personal and covenant-keeping.

[10:23] He wants to dwell in his creation and relate to his people. He is imminent. He is very near. He wants covenant relationship.

We need both pictures to live well. Another way to see why chapter 2 is a picture of rest is to notice that on day 7 of creation, there's no evening and morning.

It doesn't end, which just should leave us with the question of, okay, what does this rest look like then? And that's exactly what we find in chapter 2.

So let's get into it. What we find is that Yahweh wants relationship with his people, covenant relationship.

But this relationship isn't between equals. So if a child says to their mum and dad, I love you so much.

[11:29] I love you so much, my dad. And then just completely disobeys them again and again.

You can imagine the parents going, show me you love me by listening to what I say and doing what I say.

So too with us and our creator. It's not an equal relationship where we can kind of decide how we relate to one another.

It's between our creator and maker. And what's God's side of this relationship? Well, we see him very present.

We see him as initiating everything. We see him as providing. We see him as directing the whole thing. So it's the Lord who causes it to rain or not.

It's the Lord who forms mankind and gives him breath. It's the Lord who plants the garden, who produces every good tree for food.

[12:33] It's the Lord who puts the man in the garden to rest. It's the Lord who calls him to work and keep it, who gives him his purpose. It's the Lord who speaks directly to the man, personally to his people.

It's the Lord who declares it's not good for Adam to be alone and sets about creating a helper. It's the Lord who brings animals for him to name and rule over and care for.

It's the Lord who brings Eve to the man. And it's the Lord who institutes marriage. He's the main actor here. The Lord's side of the covenant is he's dwelling with his people.

He's providing as our creator. He gives our purpose. He's directing all things. And he tells us where goodness can be found and where it cannot be found.

I think given we live in a time and society that sees this universe as closed cause and effect system, I think we might be prone to emphasise that God is above all things, that God is sovereign.

[13:50] But do we also keep Genesis 2 in mind? He is also imminent. He is involved in everything at every moment. He's the one providing.

He's the one speaking. We need to keep both truths. He is above but he is very near. This is not a closed system.

God is, he's got his fingers in everything, so to speak. So that's the Lord's side of this covenant. What's our side?

How do we respond to such a providing, involved God? Well, the first thing is we need to know who we are, that we belong to the Lord.

So we're God's people, verses 5 and 7. So all the plants and the vegetation is preparing for verse 7.

[14:51] Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Unlike Moses' day, the ancient narratives were that the gods wanted to relax, and so they created man to do all the hard work.

After God creating everything, it's not like he needs us to work. He doesn't need us to do that. It's a gift. We'll come to that more later on in verse 15.

But here we've got the Lord God formed the man out of dust of the ground. The word ground in Hebrew is Adama. Even in his name, Adam, is a reminder we are dust.

We're so much more than dust, because it's like the Lord does mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He breathes into his nostrils. Like, that is an up-close and personal image.

That's a very different description to the rest of the animals. It's the breath, which can also mean spirit of the Lord, that animates mankind.

[16:02] It's hard to know what the implications of that are. I think at least it's suggesting man is created with capacity to relate to God on a spiritual level, and I think we see that played out in the rest of the chapter.

We are made different from the animals. We can know God personally. We are spiritual beings. So we're God's people created with capacity to be in covenant relationship. Then we have the description of the place, verses 8 to 14.

The Greek word for garden, apparently, is the word we get paradise from. This paradise, Eden, we're told is in the east, and there's relevance to that in a moment.

Just hang on to that. The river that flows from there is a single source that turns into four major rivers. Two of them we can identify with rivers that are known.

[17:10] Two of them, apparently, people guess, but we don't certainly know. The point seems to be the known world and the fertility that comes from those rivers, like the Euphrates, that's amazing.

Imagine how amazing it was at the source of all that. I think that's the point of it. It's a place of abundance. Every tree that is good for food and precious stone of gold, like this is rich.

This is a royal place. It's not some backyard. This is a huge region, size of a country. The tree of life seems to imply that there's the ability not to die.

This relationship can be ongoing. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil seems to be that if you eat it, it's not just you know about evil, but it's you experience it.

You taste it for yourself. Or maybe it's about if I take of this fruit, I'm deciding what is good and evil rather than relying on God telling me this is good and evil.

[18:27] To Israelite ears who know their Old Testament, I think they can pick up the significance of all this more easily than we can. Because a lot of these descriptions we find in the tabernacle and in the temple, God's dwelling place with Israel.

So that's where Eden being the east comes into play. That's how you enter the temple from the east. It's a place where God walks with his people.

He's in the temple. It's where cherubim are guarding it, which we come to in chapter 3. The lampstand in the temple might be, not 100% sure, but might be a picture of the tree of life.

The river producing abundance and producing all of life we see in Ezekiel's vision of coming from the temple.

And the gold and precious stones were on the priestly garments and covering all of the temple. Eden isn't just some garden.

[19:37] It's the site for God's dwelling place. The best part of Eden, the source of all the abundance, is that the Lord is there.

And I think that's why the best part is saved to chapter 3, verse 7, after the fall. When man tries to get blessing apart from God, they lose the very best part.

Walking with God in the cool of the day, at ease with him, face to face. So we have God's people in God's place, his dwelling place.

And what it means to respond to God's covenant is to be under his rule. Eden being God's temple, I think, helps us understand verse 15 better.

So the Lord God took the man and put him. That word put, apparently, is an unusual word for put. It's a word for rest. So the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

[20:50] So that double phrase, work and keep it. That, again, is used to describe spiritual service in the temple.

To work and keep it. Like the Levites, it's the highest privilege a person can have. This isn't to say that Adam was just doing spiritual kind of activities.

It's saying when he got his hands dirty in the soil, when he was caring and feeding the animals and providing for them, everything he was doing was spiritual worship.

He's a son of God. He is royal. He is representing the king. He is in God's dwelling place. He is doing spiritual service to the king in everything he's doing. Such a high calling. And I think this speaks into our view of work today. And I'm thinking paid and unpaid work.

[21 : 55] Work isn't a result of the fall. Obviously, there's a lot of pain in it, and that is. But we can reflect our creator, like we saw last week, in bringing order out of chaos.

When that poopy nappy is just stinking up the place, cleaning it and restoring cleanliness and order again, it's a little reflection, I think, of bringing order out of chaos.

When you work in a business to bring systems that serve the clients and employees well, you're bringing order out of chaos. When you're speaking truth into someone's mind, like as a teacher to a child or to one another, you're trying to bring ordered understanding to reality out of the chaos of our thinking.

I think we should see all of work as spiritual worship reflecting God as we try and bring order out of chaos.

We have a high calling to represent the king in everything we're doing. Whatever you put your hand to do, we're called to do it on God's behalf, if you say.

[23 : 07] Such a beautiful picture of work compared to what our society has. And of course, this restful worship looks like obedience.

Notice in verse 16, there's abundant permission. You may surely eat of every tree in the garden. It's all for you. Go for it.

Enjoy fellowship with me. Enjoy it in my presence. There's one prohibition.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Notice first that this is an incredible privilege.

The Lord is talking directly to the man. Communication is so essential to relationship, isn't it?

[24 : 16] It's just such a privilege to have the Lord speaking directly to us. And you might wonder why the tree is there at all.

I haven't found a satisfactory answer to that. I don't think scripture even tries to answer that. But there is a good purpose in it.

It's crucial for the full enjoyment of covenant relationship. For Adam to have the possibility of turning away from God, of not being faithful to him, allows Adam to have integrity from his heart, to choose to respond to the love of God by loving him in return, by obeying.

Having this possibility enables him to be in that genuine relationship where he's choosing to love the Lord.

So there's a very good purpose in it. So there it is. This is what it looks like to enjoy God's rest.

[25 : 33] To know who we are. Created for relationship with God. Living in abundance in his presence. To have the high calling of representing the king, serving him in everything we put our hand to do.

That's the full life. Covenant relationship is rest. And obviously we're not done with the passage. Verse 18 comes as a shock. Out of all the goodness that God has made, we suddenly get this not good. It is not good for the man to be alone.

I'll make a helper fit for him. Now that's hard to comprehend. How could it possibly not be good? I don't think there's any reason to think that Adam was aware at this point that it was not good.

I don't think it's saying that he was deficient in his joy. He had the Lord to go on evening walks with. He had plenty of relational satisfaction.

[26 : 43] He had a huge purpose in representing God. He had lots to get on and get busy with and joyfully working. It's not that Adam was deficient.

But like we saw in chapter 1, God's purposes aren't complete yet for mankind. So as we look at marriage, can I ask you to not jump ahead in your thinking to work out the implications yet for today. We need to understand the original purpose first. We'll come to that. But we need to understand the original purposes. I find it surprising and fascinating that the pinnacle of rest, what creation was meant to be, is marriage.

The creation of woman and marriage. The word helper is not a demeaning term. It's used of God lots in the Old Testament.

One example is, you might know this verse, Psalm 46.1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. It's not a demeaning term at all.

[28 : 02] She will provide for Adam in a way that he alone cannot do. Now, Christian psychologist and author Larry Crabb has helped me to see that when the Bible talks about headship and submission later on in the New Testament, it's not simply a cultural way of relating that we just have to begrudgingly try and do.

It's rooted in our makeup as men and women. He puts it, I won't quote him directly, but he puts it in that a woman craves what a man is uniquely made to give.

And a man craves what a woman is uniquely created to give. It's in our makeup. And that's why God brings the procession of animals before Adam.

He's starting to create that awareness that he isn't complete. And then she will share his image-bearing nature. So the Lord creates her out of the rib of the man.

She shares her nature as imaging God fully. And it's the Lord who is the one who fathers Eve, who creates Eve and then presents her to the man.

[29 : 28] I like to picture it as if God has Eve in his arm walking her down the aisle to give to Adam. And Adam's anticipation leads to the first love song.

At last. This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. At last. She shall be called woman. In Hebrew, isha.

Because she was taken out of man. Ish. Ish and isha. Same but complementary. Sharing the same nature.

To image God and know God in covenant relationship. Now this is... This description, it would have been radical in Moses' day. In their view of women back then.

But it's radical today, isn't it? In different ways. It's mutual service and intimacy. Compared to our culture that just wants to blur all the distinctions.

[30 : 33] And the goodness of God's design is in that final description. The man and his wife are both naked and we're not ashamed. No fear.

Oh, man. To have that, you need both an internal awareness that you have no need for shame. That you're good. Which, of course, now, our conscience plagues us.

But to have no shame, you also need to know that someone's not going to mistreat you. Even if you are good, you need to know that someone's not going to mistreat you. You need to know they are going to operate on the basis of truth and grace.

Can you imagine being totally seen for who you are and totally at ease with the person seeing you? Zero fear of being torn down. Only loved. I can't wait for heaven. It's going to be incredible society. Why is it not good for men to be alone?

[31 : 42] Because in this one flesh covenant union, man and woman have help. They help one another to worship God. But it's also not good until marriage comes because then we see what God is like.

He is a covenant-keeping God. He wants deep intimacy and commitment. And marriage is a picture of who he is.

So where it all went wrong was when Adam and Eve thought they could create a better rest, divorced from God. We have been trying to recreate rest apart from God ever since.

Especially in seeking our sense of worth and purpose in our work, the work behind the work. It's nuts. We're forfeiting our high calling of being God's ambassadors in the world, thinking that we have high status because we're a CEO of a company.

It's crazy thinking. Or we forfeit being naked and unashamed in grace-filled covenant relationships and seek it through transactional, self-protecting relationships.

[33 : 20] It's crazy thinking. We try and create rest without God. Without that covenant-keeping love.

True rest is found first and foremost in being in covenant relationship with our maker and then that overflowing in covenant commitment to one another.

But thanks be to God, he is determined to restore this rest. He restores it by making himself one flesh with us.

Jesus Christ took on our bone and our flesh. The second Adam, the second son of God, came near to us.

He is imminent. He became flesh and bone. And then he created a new covenant. Pierced in his side, laying down his life for his bride, the church.

[34 : 29] Pierced in his flesh.

You don't have to fear because you know he's dealt with your guilt. He's dealt with it. And you don't have to fear because you know he will always treat you with grace.

If you've never experienced peace with God in Jesus, you won't find it in work and relationships.

What your heart is yearning for is to be at rest with your creator.

Now the implications for this restoration, to be honest with you, it just sent me into a spin preparing this week because they're just so far reaching.

I didn't know what to say to conclude. So I'm going to suggest let's talk about it over lunch. I just want to pick up one and that is to do with marriage because it is so prominent in the text.

[35 : 57] But I'm really just picking one. How can the Apostle Paul say in 1 Corinthians 7, he who marries does well and he who refrains from marriage will do even better?

What we just looked at in Genesis 2, how can he say that? Because marriage is the pinnacle of creation. He's not downplaying marriage.

He's elevating singleness. Marriage is great. Singleness, even better. How can that be the case?

And how can Jesus say that there's not going to be marriage in the eternal age to come? If he came to restore all things, how can that be the case? I think it's as if the words of Paul in Ephesians 5, we can bring back to Genesis 2 and go, this one flesh mystery is profound.

I'm talking about Christ and the church. When God looked into history and his goal, he saw Christ and his church.

[37 : 16] And then he created marriage to be a picture of that. Once you've got the real thing, marriage is just a picture of the real thing.

To be a Christian is to be in one flesh union with God. The pinnacle of creation is God wants to marry us, if I can say that.

Respectfully. Incredible. And so I think this transforms our view of marriage and singleness as Christians today. Your purpose if you're married is to display Yahweh's covenant keeping love.

Your purpose if you're single is to display that Yahweh's covenant keeping love is even better than the best thing in creation.

So whether married or single, finishing with this sentence, we can find true rest in the covenant love we've found in Jesus Christ.

[38 : 29] Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would convince our hearts that your covenant keeping love is better than life.

So that we might respond to you, not dutifully, but joyfully in obedience and worship.

And Lord, we just pray, the bride praying, Jesus, come back, come soon. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.