

God's good design

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[0 : 00] Meg, thank you. I want to speak this morning about the sheer goodness of God, the goodness of God. And I want to speak about how good it is to be his creatures, living in his world and knowing him, this good creator of ours.

Now, in 21st century Britain, I think, mention the God of the Bible. I'm not sure there's many people who think how good that sounds, how good I want to hear about him. I mention every so often in church the line from a poem by Swinburne addressing Jesus, which I think captures a sense that people have, quote, O pale Galilean Jesus, the world has grown grey from your breath. It means that talk about God and a creator and Jesus and Christianity frankly turns things grey. I think that's what people think. God drains the life out of you. He ties you up in rigid rules. He brings misery.

It's what some people I know think. We want to be free. We want to live life in colour. We want a good life. Away with all that bad God stuff. But is that right?

Over this past six weeks, since the start of September, we've been going back to the beginnings of the Bible and the beginnings of everything. And we've discovered Genesis 1 declaring to us the foundations of our existence.

[1 : 32] If you've been here, Genesis 1. In this Genesis 1, poetic, structured, seven-day account, massively important truth we've been engaging with to shape us.

Where we come from, our origins. What this world around us is, the nature of reality. Who we are as human beings, our identity.

What we're here for, our purpose. Genesis 1.1 to 2, verse 3, is like a sweeping creation epic. Where in the beginning, God, the eternal, uncreated creator, freely decides to create the heavens and the earth.

This space-time universe. He spoke powerful words. He brought order. He formed this stable, teeming with life, good world in which we live.

Not only that, God created mankind. And he made us, in his image, different from the animals, so that we might be like him and know him and rule over his world for him.

[2 : 33] Genesis 1 is kind of wide angle and big picture. God's creation, us included. Not a cosmic accident. Not going nowhere.

But instead shot through with God-given design and purpose and value. Now this morning, chapter 2, verse 4 onwards, comes a new angle on our beginnings.

Do you see this? Now look down with me. Verse 4 starts off, This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

So Genesis now, if you like, it does a kind of Google Earth and swoops down and zooms in on one location. In the east.

In Eden. And in this garden, we meet the Lord God and the first man, Adam. These verses we've just heard read to us are so simply written, just a few brushstrokes, yet so profound and significant.

[3 : 39] They describe the beginning of history. They describe our beginnings. They describe paradise. Life as God designed it to be for us with him in his world.

And as we look at these verses this morning, I'd love us to see what we discover here is a million, million miles away from bad, grey, life-draining religion and God.

As we get into it, three things I want us to see this morning about the creator God as he relates to this first man and to all of us, his creatures.

Here's the first thing in verses 5 to 7 on the screen. The Lord God forms man, forms us lovingly. And follow along with me.

Verses 5 and 6 in the text set the scene for what takes place. Look. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground.

[4 : 48] But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. So picture some kind of near eastern semi-desert, yet there's water coming up.

There's no cultivated ground, no irrigation yet, because we're waiting for verse 7. Here's the action. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Notice a few things here. First, the man is formed from the dust of the ground. That is, he and we are not made from special spiritual material.

But the carbon and hydrogen and the solid mud and ground we walk over, that's what we're made from as human beings. We are earthy. We're connected to the ground.

Second here, we're from the dust of the ground. Dust is lifeless, nothingy stuff. In the Bible, dust is fragile, it's temporary, it's easily dispersed.

[6 : 07] That's what we are. And third, the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground. That's like a Christian, that's like a potter with clay.

Creatively, deliberately, skillfully, he formed the man and fashioned him with his hands. Saying that you and I haven't bubbled up accidentally.

A product of blind forces. No, our DNA, our organs, our limbs and features sculpted by God personally. Until in verse 7, having formed the man, the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

There's something so tender here. We talk about giving someone the kiss of life, breathing life into someone. The Lord God breathes into him tenderly and lovingly and the man becomes a living being.

It's a beautiful verse. Verse 7 is the first man created, Adam. But is meant to shape how all of us think about ourselves.

[7 : 18] Let me just show this to you. Later in the Bible, Job prays to God in Job chapter 10. Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me?

Remember that you moulded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? Do you see that, that understanding? Like the first man, I was dust.

You shaped me and moulded me as you did him. This is who we are. We then are, we are compacted dust. Our bodies crafted by God.

His breath breathed into us so that today we're alive. You're sitting here and it's his doing, it's his gift. And all through the Bible you see this underlined in different ways.

In Psalm 139 verse 13, For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. Not on the screen.

[8 : 19] In Acts chapter 17, Paul addresses clever philosophers and unbelievers. The God who made the world and everything in it, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

In creation, the Lord God forms humanity lovingly. Don't you think that's significant?

And good. Some people today are tempted to reduce us as humans. We're just a collection of chemicals and electrical impulses.

We're just space dust. We're just accidental life. Maybe more personally for some, I'm nothing. I'm a piece of meat. I'm junk.

I'm worthless. No one cares. That is not true. Some people, on the other hand, are tempted to think too much of ourselves.

[9 : 18] I'm a self-made person. I'm master of all I survey. I'm independent. I'm in control of life. I'm the man. Which is not true either. You and I are, of the dust creatures, utterly dependent on God.

That is good. The creator God has formed us, fashioned us individually, breathed life into you, an act of tender giving that today you might sit here as a living being.

Do you believe that? As for Adam, so for us. He forms us lovingly. Secondly now, in verses 8 to 14, having formed the first man, next, the Lord God provides lavishly.

See what happens here. We're into verse 8 now. Verse 8, Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. Notice three things.

First, it's a garden. It's an enclosed, protected area ready for cultivation. It's in the east. It's to the east of Israel. We don't know exactly where, but east is where the sun rises and light and life is

there.

[10:36] It's in Eden, and the name means something like delight. So the Lord plants the man in a prepared, delightful garden, a paradise.

And then provides more, verse 9. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

So here in the text, the two God-given purposes of trees. Does this sound crazy? God provides trees that are good for food. Not just one type, all kinds of trees with food attached.

So think beyond the Garden of Eden to today, and Brazil nuts and mangoes and maple syrup and cherries and cinnamon and bananas and cocoa and dates and limes. Not here by chance, all that. Don't thank nature. No, no, no. A God-given spread for humanity to taste with their God-given taste buds and enjoy. That's his provision.

[11:42] Good for food, but also trees pleasing to the eye. Which I think is a stunning thing to say, don't you? The Bible says God made trees that are on purpose delightful to the eye.

And the Botanic Garden in Cambridge has 40 acres of black pines, ornamental cherries, giant redwoods, cedars. Walk around that one day in amongst those varied trees, young and old, with big canopies creaking and moving gently.

It's beautiful. That's why we plant trees in gardens. I mean, this is just a little side comment, but would you agree that without belief in a good creator God, you are very hard-pressed to explain something like beauty and pleasure?

Why would you find a sunset captivating? Why is it that, not all of us, but many of us, enjoy areas of outstanding natural beauty?

Why do you feel so alive and human there? Why? The answer is, he's wired humanity up like this in his goodness and placed us in his world by design, able to gasp at genuine beauty.

[13:02] In Genesis 2, God provides lavishly, you see, as he does today. Verse 9, I pleasing good for food trees and in the middle of the garden with a tree of life, somehow life-giving, this tree, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

More on that in a moment. Verses 10 to 14 then take us up and out from the garden and into the rest of creation. Do you see this? A river watering the garden flowed from Eden, it's flowing, life-giving water, and from there it was separated into headwaters, the first, the Pishon, it winds through the land of Havilah, where there's gold to discover and mine and use and wear.

And the gold of that land is good, there's aromatic resin, a kind of perfume, and onyx, a precious stone, are also there. The name of the second river, the Gihon, winds through the land of Cush, the third river, the Tigris, the east side of Asher, and the fourth river is the Euphrates here.

These natural resources, gold and resin and onyx, they point in part to how providing God is, but actually also a bit more subtly to God's presence.

Because later in the Bible, these same resources adorn the tabernacle, the place where God dwells with the people of Israel. In the Garden of Eden then, the Lord God will walk with his creatures and dwell with them as he provides for them richly.

[14:49] That is God's design for us in his world. Do you know that? To live in a flourishing God-given paradise with him. Do you think God makes the world grow grey?

He doesn't. The Lord God forms us lovingly provides for us lavishly. Thirdly, in verses 15 to 17, he rules us rightly.

So reading from verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will certainly die.

Notice a few things. Do you see God simply takes the man and puts him in the garden? Like for sure, people don't like the idea of a God getting involved in our life and taking over.

What right have you got to interrupt my life? But that's not Genesis 2. It's not reality either. He's the creator. He's the creator.

[16:03] He's the potter. He has formed us and breathed life into us. We are his creatures in his world. He is involved in our lives and that is all good.

And now he rightly took the man and put him in this garden paradise with a purpose to work it and take care of it. As a couple of weeks ago from Genesis 1, here are God-given purpose of working and caring in his world.

Even though today, unlike in the garden, our work can be blessing and burden, we are still able to connect with the goodness of this God-given world, aren't we?
as in to work. To develop and build and guard a thriving, flourishing garden and world under God. To know at the end of the day the simple God-given pleasure of a job well done makes us tick to be useful like that.

God-given. And then in verse 16, the command, creator to creature.

[17 : 18] You are free to eat from any tree in the garden but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat from it you will certainly die.

This tree of the knowledge of good and evil is out of bounds and God's command to the man is a warning, it's a test even.

Don't eat from that one. It's not for you. If you disobey me if you cross the boundary and eat you will certainly die. Like unmistakably here God rules.

He's in charge. He tells us what goes and as our creator that's right because we belong to him and yet we shouldn't be misled by that.

Do you know I think it is a monster lie around that goes something like this. This Bible God, this Christian God, he will shackle you.

[18 : 21] He'll take your freedom. He'll tie you up with lots of don't do this and with him your life will shrivel. I do think people think like that.

Here's a bad example of it. A good while back now she was a lot younger. Emily and I were in our back garden just over there which isn't quite the Garden of Eden but it was a garden and I was being like that with her.

I was feeling tired and ratty and she was being very energetic. She was kicking a football around the place and bashing the fence and accidentally knocking heads off flowers and as I sat there slightly grumpily I found myself laying the law down.

Stop it. Don't do that. Find something else to do. Hands off that. And within a few minutes Emily understandably ended up just standing there sad quite keen for me to go away.

And do you not think so often people imagine God to be like that? You might remember it was quite a few years ago now there was an atheist group who organised a poster campaign on London buses and the slogan was there is probably no God now stop worrying and enjoy your life.

[19 : 37] He's such a constricting killjoy that God. But do you see this is really important that is so far from the truth in the Garden of Eden and now.

Because to the creatures he is formed in love this God provided lavish place is an oasis of freedom in the text. You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden.

It's all for you. Go and explore and eat and live freely with me as your God except this one fence this one boundary for your good.

Don't go there because you will die. No finger wagging tyrant is he but a generous righteous holy God who rules us rightly.

And that's a little bit of Genesis 2. Let's draw things together. Countering the lie I think of a grey shackling misery bringing God Genesis 2 speaks so truly and wonderfully.

[20 : 49] This is our beginnings. This is God's design. This is created life as he intends and it's so good. It is paradise. He forms humanity lovingly places us in his world provides for us lavishly would speak to us and know us and rule our lives rightly.

We who belong to him are generous creator and God. This God-given design is a million million miles away from bad grey life-draining religion and God and God yes.

Walking with this Lord God it is how we'll flourish. Life in the Garden of Eden is what we're made for and it is good. Do you know this finally this morning that the joy of the Christian gospel and the news about Jesus Christ is that the life of Genesis 2 that we've just read about is still offered to us.

As history moves forward from Genesis 2 we will come to it in a couple of weeks we see paradise lost. Adam the first man the earthly man disobeys God appallingly he took and epped from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil God had said you must not but Adam and Eve turn from their creator in willful defiance and sin and in his just judgment because he had said you will certainly die God thrust Adam and Eve out of paradise and away from his immediate presence and blessing and life and thrust humanity into the world of curse and death that we inhabit and experience today we who like Adam have sinned and yet the glory is that the Lord God did not give up on his good design because in his love he sent a second man into the world and the

New Testament calls him the last Adam not the first but the second the last Adam and this man who comes into the world not the man of dust the earthly man but the heavenly man do you know what his name is his name's Jesus and unlike the first Adam and unlike you and me this last Adam Jesus was everything that you and I were meant to be and he walked with God humbly and he obeyed God perfectly and he had every right to take from the tree of life and eat and live forever the perfectly blessed life of Genesis 2 his by rights but this Lord Jesus the second Adam chose to die he chose to bear on his shoulders the curse and death that Adam and you and I deserve and not eating from a tree of life but nailed to a tree of death he died in our place and for our sins and he did that so that

[24 : 13] God might offer us forgiveness and restoration and access once more into paradise that is why he came do you know this today when a man or woman boy or girl turns from our Adam-like disobedience and we place our faith in Jesus Christ we begin to know again this life of Genesis 2 flourishing of which we've been talking with our creator who is now our saviour as a Christian believer now and today someone who belongs to Jesus he is my Lord my God and my father he who has formed me a second time given me new birth and made me a new man and walking with me through the joys and hardships of life he is with me and provides for me lavishly and truly now to serve and obey this so generous

God and saviour is perfect freedom it is good to belong to Christ and walk with God today but that is not all because as we heard read from Revelation 22 and I'll read in a minute the Bible looks forward to a day when Eden Genesis 2 is fully restored and on that future day everyone who belongs to Jesus the last Adam will once more walk in paradise we will on a renewed earth and we will eat from the tree of life and we will serve our God and we will see his face forever and ever that is a certain future promise to those who put their faith in Jesus and that that will be so so good and it will be so good on that day because God is so good we've read from Genesis 2 let me read from Revelation 22 and then I will lead us in a prayer and we'll sing Eden restored then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city on each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations no longer will there be any curse the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads there will be no more night they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever

Almighty God and Father our good creator we are so thankful for your loving generosity towards us in your good design you form us lovingly provide for us lavishly rule us rightly and in your deep love you sent Jesus into the world to live and die for those like us that we might once again enter paradise please help us together to see you rightly and trust you deeply our good creator and our stunning saviour in Jesus name amen