

# Genesis 2:4-17

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 30 January 2022

Preacher: Rev. Ben Roberts

[0:00] It is a privilege to open God's Word together in this rich, rich passage. Like all scripture, God has something trustworthy and true to say here in Genesis.

And while it doesn't speak to everything that we might want to know about, it does tell us what we need to know about. So these early chapters in Genesis, they're just really not interested in describing human origins the way a biology textbook would.

And as curious as we are about those things, Genesis just doesn't use that genre to tell us about it. But instead what it does is define from God's perspective who we are, and why we are here, and what our purpose is.

This is a big shift from chapter 1 that you've been studying for the last few weeks. And verse 4, right in the beginning, marks that shift. It says, 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.

The whole book of Genesis is structured by these regular generations statements. And they describe what comes forth from the subject that is mentioned. So here, it talks about the generations of the heavens and the earth.

[1:18] And these chapters are actually going to be all about humanity. The goal of God forming and filling in chapter 1 was to set humans as his image in creation.

And now we'll see what that actually means, now that they're set in creation. You saw that verse 4 began with heavens and earth, and it closed with earth and heavens.

And that's the perspective change exactly that happens in this chapter. Chapter 1 is from the heavens looking in, watching this magnificent thing be formed from afar. But now we're on earth, and we're looking around.

And it turns out that on earth, looking around and seeing what happens, God is not just out there. He's actually down here. He's in the garden.

He's on earth. He's doing things. The middle of verse 4 uses God's personal name for the first time in Genesis. He's not just God, this distant being that's forming things.

[2:16] He's the Lord God. He's Yahweh, and he's close here. The transcendent creating God is also relational. He's in relationship with people. And in chapter 2, he's near us.

He's in our place. And he's doing a lot of us-like things. He's forming soil. And he's planting trees. And he's making gardens. And what Yahweh, this relational God, says and does in this chapter, will show exactly who we are in relationship to him, why we're here, and what he's made us to do.

So, three points for your note-taker. The first is person. The second is place. And the third is purpose. Person, place, purpose.

So, let's look at this person. In verses 5 to 7, we meet the person that creation has been waiting for. And the first images in this remind us, actually, of chapter 1.

Just as God hovered over what was formless and void before he formed it and filled it, here the earth waits to be formed from wilderness into a garden.

[3:27] It says, Now, I don't think this means that there were no plants on earth. It's speaking specifically of the field.

It's speaking of cultivation, cultivated crops, agriculture. Those aren't here because there's no one to work the ground. That's the reason that it gives us here in Genesis.

There's no gardener to grow things. Likewise, it says, So, these verses aren't so much about some sort of strange proto-ecology of what the world was like a really long time ago.

They're about how this person relates to this place. This person God made relates to the place he has put them. In chapter 1, humans are given the mandate, you remember this, to take dominion.

And in chapter 2, as we begin it, the earth waits. It kind of holds its breath. It's waiting for this image bearer to go ahead and do something, to go ahead and take dominion.

[ 4 : 39 ] It's just like God ordered the cosmos from chaos. Now the earth is going to be ordered from wilderness by God's image that he has set there. Now this contrasts the view that nature is just pristine and perfect and wonderful without any human influence.

I was reading that there's researchers that believe that the Amazon rainforest, which we think of as this just bastion of wild diversity, actually may be more akin to a giant garden.

That it was actually perhaps made by generations of indigenous forestry and management. That there were people for thousands and thousands of years planting and spreading and cultivating a forest.

We look at it, we think it's wild. It's actually more like a garden. It feeds them. It has more food per square mile than any other place in the world. Dominion doesn't always mean building strip malls. What we think of as being wild and natural isn't always exactly wild and natural. And this all points towards God's ultimate goal for what he has made.

[ 5 : 48 ] His goal is not wilderness and us just trying to stay out of the way of it. His goal is good stewardship. Not exploitation or destruction, but care and cultivation as well as enjoyment.

The earth belongs to us to order. This is how God set it up. And it waits here for us to do it. But it's also clear in this chapter that we belong to the earth.

This is very clear. Being in God's image and being given this task to rule, which is an amazing and wonderful thing, we might imagine that we're outside the world, that we're kind of above it. More like God.

But Genesis 2 goes to great lengths to remind us that that's not the case. Verse 7 says, Yahweh, the Lord God formed.

This speaks to God's intentionality in making human life. Psalm 139 actually uses the same language and talks about how God forms all humans, even from within the womb.

[ 6 : 55 ] And what this means is that we aren't just a happy accident here. We're purposefully made. Other ancient creation accounts from this time say that humans were made as slaves for the gods to bring them food.

Or that maybe they occurred accidentally because the gods were having a fight. And then like, oh no, there's all these humans. Like, ah, what are we going to do with them? And actually, modern origin accounts speak of us more like a cosmic lottery ticket.

Like just this amazing thing that has appeared that no one expected. But Genesis says that Yahweh formed us and forms us. And his intentionality in forming us means that we have a purpose.

Which is really good news, since we're always looking for purpose. So what did Yahweh form? It says he formed a man or a person from dust. He formed the earthling from earth.

And the reason I say it like that is because there's a really intentional connection in Hebrew in the language. Ha'adam means human person or man. And it sounds exactly like Adama, which means earth or dust.

[ 8 : 06 ] And later on in the chapter, we'll meet a human man named Adam, which is Ha'adam made into a personal name. It's all very confusing. It all sounds very similar. This is before the separation of male and female in the chapter.

And the emphasis is not as much here on maleness in this man as it is on humanness. We're not supposed to be thinking so much about him being a man as we are about him being from the earth. And to be earthy is to be dusty. It's to be physical. It's to be mortal. So it doesn't so much mean that the first human was summoned up from floor sweepings.

It means that we're part of creation. We're within it. We're made up of this stuff. All of it that's around us. And even though we're also in God's image, as Genesis 3 says, From dust you came, to dust you shall return.

The forming of this person reveals what is true of all people. We're all made of this earthy stuff. And we return to earthy stuff when we die. We have the breath of life in us, yes, during the time of our animation and life here.

[ 9 : 17 ] But later on in Genesis 7, it will actually say that all living animals have the same breath of life. So it's not a special spiritual quality that God gives man here. It's just him giving life to the creature that he's made out of stuff.

Why would Genesis want to say that so strongly, do you think? Why insist that humans are an integral part of this world? I think maybe it's just something we really need to hear.

Throughout the history of humanity, we're always coming up with reasons why we're not just earthy people. You know, the Bible is very clear.

We're not angels. We're not spiritual beings. We're also not preexistent souls that are trapped in a cycle of reincarnation that for this moment just happened to have a body. We're not meant to transcend the material and escape it.

We're not meant to scorn it. And we can't escape into pure light someday. That's what the Greeks believed. In fact, we cannot separate identity from body.

[10:22] They're one and the same. And from the beginning and insistently throughout, the Bible teaches that we are made as material beings. And that any sort of salvation that is real, if it means anything at all, it has to save our whole person.

It has to save us in real terms. It can't be an imaginary thing that's separate from the world we live in. Many things have gone awry in creation since Genesis 2. But physicality is not one of the things that has gone wrong.

It's a good thing. In our first reading, Paul reminded us of that, didn't he? This final hope that we have. It's not an escape from the material world. It's not an elevation out of it, a graduation from it. It's a physical transformation into a resurrection body like Christ's. He said, we're now in the image of the man of dust. We're mortal.

We're earthly. We're sinful. But our hope is to be transformed into the image of the man of heaven. And Christ has shown us what that looks like.

[11:23] It looks like a resurrected body. That's what our future looks like. It's embodied. That's what eternal hope looks like. So, we're made as physical beings.

And in Christ, we will be saved as physical beings, capable of dwelling with God in his place forever. So, we better get on to our second point.

Let's look at what place we're in. And this is verses 8 to 14. The place that God puts his earthy people is a garden. Verse 8.

God carves out this place within the wilderness of the world. And it's a place of order and provision and flourishing. And it's called Eden, which means luxury. It's a beautiful and good place to live.

Yahweh puts every good tree there for food. In addition to the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And when we think about Eden, or when people have written about it through the years, we think about it always as a place that we've lost and a place we wish we could go back to.

[12:26] And often connected with that idea is this idea of pampering and ease. And it's like this all-inclusive resort. It has a poolside bar. And it has a private beach. And everything was great.

And we long to find that place of pleasure and ease again in our lives. We want it so much that we board jets to fly to it. And we build cabins and cottages to live there, if only on holiday.

But unfortunately, this idea of ease is not actually what the text is talking about. This garden isn't a place for lazy luxury.

It's for working and worshiping. And it's because this place is actually a garden temple. So all of the imagery present here, and a lot of it has seemed strange to us, but in the ancient Near East, it's temple language.

And we see this imagery throughout the Old Testament. So whenever it speaks about temples, it talks about the kinds of stuff that we see here in Eden. So just as Eden is planted in the east, Israel's tabernacle and their temple face east.

[13:36] Just as Eden is the font of a river, four rivers really, that flow out of it, Ezekiel's vision for the temple has a river flowing out of it.

And if you think about all the imagery in Israel's temple, that they build at God's direction, it's covered in garden imagery. There's pomegranates and plants and animals and all kinds of things on the walls.

And the lampstands, even within the temple, are made to look like trees. And it's just like the garden that Yahweh made for us in the beginning. This garden in Eden is supposed to make us think of a temple and temple grounds.

The place that you go to meet with God and worship God, it looked like that place. There's even gold and precious stones and all of the stuff that will go into the temple eventually. So, God builds and then places his person in this garden temple, and it's a place where he can meet with Adam

and Eve and walk in the cool of the day.

It's a place where they can comfortably dwell in relationship with him, all of their needs being met, even as they fulfill the work that is before them. This says something really important about our ultimate place.

[14:52] The place that we were created to be, says Genesis, is the place where we are with God, where we're in right relationship with him, where we are fulfilling our purpose before him.

That's where we belong. The goal of life, then, is not leisure. And we know from our own experience that such a place wouldn't satisfy us anyway. Rest too quickly becomes restlessness.

Any sort of unbridled consumption that we let ourselves go into becomes overconsumption. And material security breeds anxiety over what we might lose.

Pleasure in God's garden is not about idleness, it's about presence. Yahweh's place for his people is with him. And we will one day, finally and fully, in the new heavens and earth, be with him in the way that we were with him in the garden.

But don't forget that in between those two things, God has invaded earth in a human body. And the shocking reality is that God's place for us is already available in some way through Jesus.

[16:04] Because in Jesus, we dwell with God. We're grafted into him, right? He speaks of us, his church, as branches bearing virtuous fruit. He speaks of us as a holy temple made of living stones.

He speaks of us as his body. This people, us, bound together in Jesus and pursuing his work, that's paradise found. This is the closest that we can get to it until the end of all things.

So all that to say, if you want to get to God's place, don't seek it out there. Don't seek it in isolation. Don't seek it in idleness or leisure.

Seek Jesus. Seek fellowship. Seek worship. Seek work that matters in his living temple. That's where you'll find it. And that takes us to our final point, which is purpose.

This is verses 15 to 17. Verse 15 says, The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

[17:08] There's the word work, right? Eden is not a place of idle luxury. It's a place of meaningful labor. To work it and keep it means to tend and guard.

So later on, when the priests are given work in the temple of God, when it's built, they are told to work it and keep it. The very same words. So this person is also a priest at work in God's temple. Worship and work here are one and the same. In the garden, work was not necessary evil that we had to get over with. It was a purposeful delight. Not that it wasn't tiring or hard.

I'm sure it was. It was just worth it. Imagine the earthling walking around and trimming trees and digging up gemstones and making fruit salads or whatever they might have done.

And there's a sense there of cultivating and subduing and extending God's garden into the world. And all of it is joyful obedience at his command. It's living and working worship.

[18:09] I imagine that I see something like this in my children, the way that they eat and play. Their delight in showing what they've made, of sharing back pieces of food that I've given to them.

Much of their life is like a tended garden for now. Think then of the man walking with God in the cool of the night through this garden and they admiring together just the accomplishments of the day.

This physical and creative worship constantly being worked out in the things that are being done. Keeping and tending God's temple garden to please him and maybe impress him.

To stretch the possibility of what our hands can do for him. But there's also a boundary or a border around this creative work, isn't there?

And it relates to the two trees that are there out of many. And these are more than just trees because they have names and regular trees don't have names. There's the tree of life and there's the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

[19:18] And God gives a command as they go about all this work and joy in the temple and he says, eat of any tree including, of course, the tree of life. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day you eat it you shall surely die.

In God's garden he is the Lord God who has made the earthling who has put him in this place to prosper his relationship with God and in this relationship and this place and the way that God has made everything and who we are to him there are parameters as there are in any relationship.

And the parameters are we are not God even though we're in his image. We are mortal. We rely on him for the breath of life. If we want to be more than dust it comes from the tree of life.

It comes from him. It's his gift. But when we eat from the other tree and we break God's command it is defining for ourselves the rules of the world how things ought to be. Defining for ourselves good and evil.

To eat from it is the pretension to take God's place for ourselves. And to eat from it is to despoil to ruin this temple garden that exists for worship and for presence and relationship.

[ 20 : 31 ] It actually inverts the purpose for which all our work was made. In eating it we turn life to death. We'll learn more about it in Genesis 3. The fall this turn from worship is why work is something that we often dread and hate.

Sin has stolen the delight from us. it's obscured the purpose of our work. What was formerly joy is now laced all throughout with vanity. But let me remind you again that Yahweh has come to find us as a person in a body.

He's broken into our lives and that changes everything. Later on in the Bible Paul will say whatever you do work heartily as for the Lord and not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. If in your work you are scraping to survive or pursuing an idyllic Eden to make for yourself it will disappoint you.

But if your work pursues the honor and glory of Christ you are laying up work that lasts work that becomes an inheritance work that matters. it means that every small and trivial thing we might do is caught up into the larger glory and victory and purpose of the one we serve.

[ 22 : 00 ] His restoration and resurrection make work matter. In Christ we find purpose for our work now as we wait for all things to be made new.

In him our work is caught up into worship again by honoring and serving him. and in this way we eat from the tree of life which is Christ's cross.

We find hope and joy in something that started out as drudgery. there is a lot of hope and joy in this chapter especially from what we know in Christ because our dusty image is one day going to mirror his heavenly image.

Our estranged place which is here will in him be restored to God's true place and our work and our worship until then becomes joyful and meaningful only through him.

So it turns out we don't only learn about what it means to be human by looking to the beginning but also by looking to the end. For as Christ is we also will be humans at worship in his garden temple.

[ 23 : 11 ] Amen.