

Genesis 2:4-17 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, folks. It's really nice to see you. Wonderful to see you. If you haven't met me before, my name is Aaron and I look after the service. We are three weeks or week three into a new series looking at Genesis. It's been awesome so far. Tonight, Genesis 2, 4 to 17. And why are these particular verses so important? Why are they so important? There are lots and lots of people in the world who have made the decision implicitly or explicitly that they don't need God in their life. They don't need God. But they will work really hard at just being good humans, good human beings who treat others well. And there's probably the sense of like, I don't need God to find meaning. I don't need religion. I'm just going to be a really decent human being, which is a very sort of attractive way to approach life, I think. Just be a good person. Just be a good person. Isn't that what it means to be human? Well, Genesis 2 tells us, though, that you can't be fully human without God.

Why? Because you were, one, made by God, and two, made by God with a purpose in mind. And that's pretty much the sermon right there. But we're going to unpack it a little bit.

So let's look at those ideas. Before we do, just a brief comment about the passage as a whole and where it fits into the story. Because you might be thinking, this sounds like another account of creation. Didn't we, I was like two weeks ago, didn't we already do this?

What about Genesis 1? Sounds like a different version. What's going on? Some people struggle with this. They try and sort of harmonize these two versions. And it's a bit difficult for them.

And I would just say, don't be too distracted by that. The best answer I can give you for why there's a second version and why it's sort of different is chapter one is think of it as the meta story, like the big story. And chapter two here zooms in on the human part of the story.

[2 : 2 2] So it tells this one piece of chapter one with more detail about the human part of it. So again, don't be sort of too distracted by trying to work out how these things exactly relate to each other.

Remember, we're dealing with the genre, a literary genre that like does not exist in the English language, in English literature. So we will, we've heard it read, we will listen to it, and we'll ask ourselves, what is God trying to tell us by focusing in here on the story of the creation of humanity? So that's the plan. Let's get into it. First point, very simple. We were made by God. Verse seven, the Lord formed the man of dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The man became a living creature. Formed. It's a great word, isn't it? Formed.

It's actually an artistic word in Hebrew. It means crafted. God carefully crafted the first people.

In Genesis one, God sort of just speaks and, and these kind of atoms kind of, you know, pop into existence. But here, the picture is, is more detailed. It's like God was like a potter or like a sculptor carefully chipping away at marble to reveal something beautiful and precious. And that's you.

Here we have this picture of God getting his hands dirty, getting into the dirt and the dust and making us. So God formed us, crafted us carefully. And then it says, God breathed into us.

[4 : 12] In the New Zealand Maori tradition, when you greet somebody, you do something called a hongi, which is what you do is you press your, I don't know if you, you might have seen this, might not, but you press your forehead and your nose against that person. So you might shake their hand and then lean forward and press your nose and your forehead against that person. And then you pause, maybe like 10 seconds, and then you take a breath, you take a breath in, you stay in, stay in that moment.

And you're breathing in their breath. You're like, you're breathing in their life. And it's this very beautiful and very sort of intimate way of greeting somebody.

I mention that because this idea of God breathing into us, it's not meant to convey sort of magic, you know, like some magic thing that God does. It's meant to convey the fact that from the very beginning, there was intimacy between God and his creation, in particular, this person he made.

So God didn't just sculpt us. He gave us something. He gave us his breath. He gave us his life. Okay, summarize so far. It's a bit early for a summary, but I do really like a summary.

So here we go. So humans were created, crafted by a relational God. Now, let's add another layer to that. Do you see the name of God used in the passage here?

[5 : 59] It's not just God did this, God did that. It's the Lord God. It's an unusual pairing in the Bible. In this chapter alone, 11 times, Lord God, Lord God, Lord. When you see the word Lord in the Bible, it's often in capital letters. It's not just another way of saying God. It's talking about a particular characteristic of God. It's reminding us that this is a God that makes a covenant with people. So God not only makes us, not only gives us his life, breathes into us, but God is willing to bind himself to his creation. This thing he just made out of mud and dust. He wants to bind himself. And that whole thing comes later on in the story, but it's referenced here to emphasize the closeness of the relationship between God and humanity. So all of us here and everybody you ever meet in your life was crafted by a relational God. And to be fully human means to live out of that reality. Because this, folks, is your origin story. And origin stories are really, really important. And we know this because of superhero movies, right? You think of superhero movies that always have an origin story, and it's always really important. You know, Peter Parker sees Uncle Ben, sees his uncle, this is Spider-Man, okay. Peter Parker sees his Uncle Ben killed by somebody, and then he becomes Spider-Man, and he commits his life to, you know, being a hero and stopping baddies, right? So when you watch, and you can read stuff on this. People have, you know, there's PhDs on this stuff. The origin stories shape the movie franchises. All the storylines, it grounds everything that happens afterwards. So we have an origin story. God carefully, carefully crafted you and said, here's what I want you to do. He gave you a purpose. It means you matter, you're important, you're important, and your life is bigger than just kind of getting on with your life and doing stuff. There's more to it, which leads us to point two. Human beings were made with a purpose in mind, and it's a twofold purpose. The first is to look after the garden. And you saw that, it's pretty clear in here. Do you notice there's a strange detail in verse five? You notice there were, it says, no bushes or plants in the fields. You know what I said? That's kind of odd detail, right?

There's no bushes or plants in the fields. And why is that? It says that because it says God has not given rain. So that seems quite reasonable. There's no bushes, no plants. God has not given rain. Why has not God given rain? Because there's no one to work the ground. There's no one to take care of the planet when things did grow. So God did not allow the earth to flourish until humanity was made.

There's a pun in the Hebrew here in Genesis. The person, man here, the word is Adam, Adam, A-D-A-M, right? It means people. It can mean male, female. It just means people, right? Ground here is Adamah, just Adam with an A on the end. And the pun is important because it's trying to tell us that we were made for the earth and the earth was made for us. There's a special relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. You know, sometimes you get the idea that, you know, sometimes people will say things like, you know, the planet would be so much better off without people. So much better off without people. It would just do great. It's an understandable sentiment, but it's not the way God intended it to work. The way God set it up, humanity exists to actually fulfill a lack in creation. And the lack is the earth actually needs to be taken care of. It's now it's our job to do it.

I mean, it's very clear in verse 15 here. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. So all that to say, human beings are not just part of nature. We're actually responsible for nature. So our purpose, work the field, make it work, work the world, make it sort of happen, make it flourish. Second though, second purpose, there's a moral purpose, a moral purpose and design for us. God doesn't just say, look after the world, make it flourish. He says, obey me. Verse 16 and 17, let me remind you. And this is strange for our ears. I know it's kind of strange, right? And the Lord God commanded the man saying, you may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in that day that you eat it, you will surely die. Now, a great question is, why put it there in the first place?

Right? It's a really reasonable question. You've made this great thing. And let's say the garden is sort of bounded somewhat. And you've chucked this great tree right smack in the middle of it.

[11 : 24] Like what? I know it just wasn't the option to not make it as well. Wouldn't that have been a good option? I want to say a couple of things about that. Firstly, remember there are two trees in verse nine. This tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God says, the tree of life, just have at it. Fantastic. It's a great tree. Go after that tree. Right? The other tree, don't eat it. Don't eat the fruit that comes off there.

Right? So the tree's not magic. Right? It's not magic. It's not like this good, you know, it's like one's poison and one's like got tons of vitamin C in it or something like that. Right?

It's, there's nothing magic about this. God could have said, here's two streams. Don't drink of the one on the right or something. It's, the big issue is that God is saying no to that thing right there, saying no to that thing. And why would God do that? One of the ways to think about this tree issue is this. It represents the opposite of discipleship. It represents doing your own thing.

Eating the fruit is declaring to God, I'm independent of you. Even though God has clearly spoken, God has spoken, it's saying my way. And that leads to spiritual death because it's separating yourself from the source of life, the source of your life.

In this sort of cultural moment, I think we're told that freedom, you will find freedom if you just do whatever you want. And it doesn't really work out like that, I think. The other thing I'll say about this whole tree business is, I think it's easy to hear the story and get really focused on what God prohibits. You kind of read it and you go, why did he say no to that? And we can start to think God is stingy. And we can, because we can start thinking about some of the things that God prohibits in our life. And we can think God is being stingy to us. He's ripping us off. We can think being obedient to God is, God's holding out on me. If I'm obedient, I'm losing out on life somehow. And that can become the focus. But let me read a couple of verses from the passage to you again. 8 to 10.

[13 : 55] So it's not only nice to eat, it's beautiful. Like he created us with the capacity to delight in things and he created delightful things. Isn't that great, right? The tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden and there it divided and became four. That's a lot of rivers. That's a lot of water. It's fantastic, isn't it? The name of the first was Pishon and out of it flowed to this whole land.

And there's gold and it's really good gold, verse 12 says, right? And there's something called Dela. I don't know what that is. Onyx? I think that sounds really great. There's lots of good stuff. Do you see what I'm saying? It's a picture of abundance. There's lots of food. There's lots of beautiful things to look at. There's lots of precious things. It's abundance. And God says, it's all yours. Take care of it. It's a picture of God giving and giving and giving.

It's just this one thing. It's one thing that he says no to. Because he wants to teach his people that there is a moral obligation. There is a morality that I want you to obey. So he says, there's this one thing no to. But you read it in the context of here and we can focus on the one thing, but this is trying to convey the kindness and generosity of God. God is not stingy. When you think about the things in your life that you're working really hard at sort of not getting into because you know that dishonor is God, God is not trying to rip you off.

Our God is not stingy. Okay, let's tidy this up. Let's think about applications and implications. And so I'll summarize what I've done so far, but there is a plot twist right at the end.

So you know, there's a plot twist coming. Okay, so here we go. So you, me, everybody, everybody we meet has been crafted by a relational God and to be fully human means to recognize that.

[16 : 14] That's your origin story. Live out of that origin story. There's a lot of competing origin stories out there. Live out of this origin story. God has given us a purpose.

And he's given us boundaries. So being human doesn't look like doing whatever you want. To be fully human is to live within the boundaries that God has made. And he's spoken clearly about them. Okay, the plot twist now. So there's a lot of great creation theology in this chapter. And it's theology that deserves our attention.

But I think it would be a mistake to make that the complete focus of chapter two. It's important, but I don't think it's the complete focus. And I say that because context is really important. And in part, what we've read so far, I believe exists to set up the big thing that happens next. And what's the big thing that happens next? After the creation of other people, it's the fall. It's setting up the scandal of the fall that we would reject, that we would reject this God. And what a scandal it is. Because we read this chapter and it's about abundance and beauty and this precious connection to God. So we should read it and we should grieve.

We should look at what humanity turned its back on. A beautiful, peaceful, flourishing world and a perfect relationship with our Creator. I think we're supposed to read these and long, like long for the new world that God has for us. We should long for paradise again. And God has made that possible.

There's a lot to be cynical about right now and a lot to be depressed about right now. But God has made a way. In John 20, there's a direct reference back to this passage we've been looking at.

[18 : 39] After Jesus was raised from the dead. Actually, let me just read it to you. So Jesus has just been raised from the dead. The first day of the week, that's actually important. The first day of the week.

It's sort of pointing to the fact that, you know, this is the first day that God starts remaking stuff. The first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. When they heard this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then his disciples were glad when they saw the Lord Jesus said to them, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. And then he commissions them to disciple the world.

See, John 20 is this deliberate reference back to Genesis. Jesus breathes into his followers, like his life. He gives them his life. The life of God. And he gives them a new purpose.

He gives them a new start. It's the beginning of God's plan to recreate humanity and the world. So as you think about Genesis, let it feed that longing for a restored world and to be a restored people.

[19 : 55] And let it put an axe to any thought that, you know what, I could do this whole human thing better by myself without God.

You can't. Amen.