

Genesis 2:18-25

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

- [0 : 0 0] So we're in the story of Genesis, you know that. So God creates this astonishing world and he needs humanity to help it flourish.
- He creates humanity to help it flourish. And at every point in the process of creating the world, God says, it's good, it's good, it's good, it's good.
- It's very good. But here in verse 18, we get a bit of a surprise because for the first time, God says, it's not good. This is not good. And what is he talking about? He's talking about Adam's state.
- Then the Lord God said, it is not good that a man should be alone. Now, it doesn't seem that God looked at Adam and thought, oh, he's looking a bit mokey.
- Adam wasn't complaining. But God saw a lack. And in a very tricky move, God helped Adam to see that lack as well.
- [1 : 1 2] And the way he helped Adam see the lack was by asking him to name the animals. And it'll make sense when I read it to you again. Verses 19 to 20. 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. And the man gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast in the field. But for Adam, there was not found a helper fit for him.
- So God tells Adam to name the animals. And he's not naming them as pets. He's not like, oh, you're Mr. Pickles and you're Snoopy and stuff like that. It's like, I think, an exercise in taxonomy. This is your class of animals.
- You're going to be this class of animals. You're going to be this class of animals. And remember, this is part of humanity's job. In order to make the place flourish, this is an exercise in dominion as well, which we learned a couple of weeks ago is a good word, not a bad word.
- And as Adam is doing this, he realizes his need. He has not found a helper fit for him. So as great as these animals were, they couldn't help him in the job of caring for God's good creation.
- [2 : 2 4] They couldn't partner with him in this astonishing work that God had given. Now, a question, an interesting question is this.
- Why did this need exist? Why couldn't Adam just be cool with being by himself? I mean, just as a thought exercise, right?
- Like, why wasn't he just cool with it? I mean, he's a brand new thing. He's got lots to do. You know, he's got plenty to get on with. Like, he'd ask it like this.
- Why did God make him like this with this huge relational need? And the answer is because Adam was made in the image of God.
- And not just a God. The God. The God who is triune. The God who is three in one. The God who is a community of persons. So Adam was made in the image of a community.

[3 : 26] That's why he needed others. That's why we all need others. It's baked into our creation. We're made in the image of a community.

So it's one of the reasons why COVID has been so brutal. Because it's cut all these kind of relational connections. You know, we want to be known and we want to be loved and we want to be cared for.

So, summarized so far. God has made us in such a way that our deep desire for connection and relationship could not be fulfilled by just being with God.

God designed us to need other people. So the shared life is God's plan for a life that will flourish.

So God helps Adam recognize this. Adam recognizes it. And then God deals with the problem. The end of verse 18.

[4 : 38] I will make for him a helper. A helper. Fit for him. And then God does it in verse 21. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man.

And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed it up in its place. With flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman.

A woman. And brought her to the man. God makes Adam a partner. And if you listen closely, if you listen to the details here, you see that this other person, this brand new creation, this other thing, is something that is like him.

And I think that's what the whole rib thing is supposed to tell us. It's like him. The same essence as him. The same stuff as him.

So like him. But also different. God didn't make another man. He makes a woman. So like him. And unlike him.

[5 : 49] God makes a woman. Adam's really stoked about this. He breaks out into this poem. You know, like, finally. Bone of my bone.

Flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman. So he recognizes and celebrates the sameness and the difference. Now. This idea of the woman being called a helper fit for him.

I am going to assume that that doesn't land well in our cultural moment. But. It doesn't translate well, does it? Because it makes it sound like that she is secondary.

That she is sort of beneath him. And it has been viewed in this way. And that's led to some really sort of toxic theology. So what does helper and fit mean?

Does it mean kind of what immediately comes to mind? Or does it mean something else perhaps? And hopefully I'm going to show you it means something else. So one way we interpret words of the Bible is we look at where else the same word has been used.

[7 : 01] And see what it means there. To help us understand what it means here. Does that make sense? Right. So the word in Hebrew for helper is there. Is used 21 times in the Old Testament.

21 times. And here's the surprise. 16 of those times. The word for helper is used to describe. Abe. Any ideas?

It's used to describe God. 16 times. So Moses calls God his helper in Exodus 18. So in every use of the word helper is talking about somebody or something else that is superior or equal to.

So there's no hint in this description of Eve as somebody who is less than or secondary or beneath or subpar. I'll also add that the Bible is unique.

Is unique. And that it actually talks about the creation of women. There is no other ancient text from the Middle East that offers any commentary at all on the creation of women.

[8 : 08] So all that to say I do want to acknowledge the word helper does not translate well. But it's not a demeaning term. Now the last part of it. A helper fit for him.

The word fit means she is meeting a lack in him. By himself, man could not fulfill God's mandate set for him to care for creation.

They needed each other to do it. And creation needed them both. Now, a short excursus. And then I'm going to finish up.

This is a short sermon. A short excursus. The distinctives of being male and female are really important. And they're highlighted in this passage.

God made people distinctively male and distinctively female. He made them embodied creatures. They were embodied and they both reveal something about who God is.

[9 : 15] What am I trying to say here? I'm trying to say that our male and female bodies matter. They are good. And they matter. So Foucault, who was a French philosopher, has had a heavy influence on how people think about bodies today.

For him, everything was a social construct. And to be truly free, you had to set yourself free from your body. So gender is a construct, for example. And this is an idea that's very pervasive now.

And I think the result of this is this subordinating of the importance of female and male bodies as distinctive and valuable things.

Nancy Percy is a Christian scholar who has very reasonable things to say about this on the topic. My wife and I are reading a book called Love Thy Body, which I would recommend to you.

And she's sort of, in unpacking Foucault's influence, she says this, and I'm sort of paraphrasing her at the start. She says, when we sense dissonance between the body and the mind, she's talking about today.

[10 : 21] When we sense dissonance between the body and the mind, the mind always wins. Today. And that's a novelty. That's a new thing.

Her thesis is, does that make any sense? Does it actually make sense that that's the way it works? And let me quote directly from her book, Love Thy Body. Why is it considered acceptable to carve up a person's body to match their inner sense of self, but bigoted to help them change their sense of self to match their body?

Feelings can change. But the body is an observable fact that does not change. It makes sense to treat it as a reliable marker of sexual identity.

Now, Christians get accused of all sorts of bigotry and hatred when it comes to these issues. And to be fair, many Christians have done a terrible job of talking about such things.

But I think the underlying motivation is that, well, one of the things the creation story gives us is it just gives us a very high view of the body.

[11 : 34] It gives us a very high view of the body. And I think in this cultural moment, culturally, unintentionally, around issues of gender, the body's importance, I think, I feel like is being demoted.

So I think we should talk about these issues because our bodies do matter. And I believe right now we're being taught a very reductionist view of our physicality. The meaning around embodiment is being robbed.

Anyway, there is a lot to say about this, and I'm not going to say it. There's lots of huge pastoral implications. I was reading Colossians 3 this morning, and it talked about compassion and kindness and how we communicate.

And we haven't always done a great job of that. But I'll just summarize this and just say this. God created men and women. And the embodiment of those genders, it matters.

It matters for many reasons, including that they say something about who God is. And Jesus talks about this. Jesus actually quotes this passage in Matthew 19.

[12 : 49] He's talking about God, and he says, He who created them, male and female, and said, No, the man shall leave his mother and father, etc., etc., etc.

Our physical bodies matter. Our gender that is baked into those bodies matters. It's important. Okay, to finish. Genesis is our origin story.

We've looked at the first couple of chapters now, and what have we learned? We've learned that God made us male and female. He made us to help one another serve him in partnership to care for this amazing creation.

For some of us, that partnership will look like marriage, but not all of us. The Bible has a high regard for singleness. It's probably better to say, as a community of people, like and unlike, we're here to live and look after and enjoy God's creation.

That's where we've got to in the story so far. We also have learned that in the place that God made for us, in this garden, God put two trees. And those trees represent things.

[14 : 13] One tree represents choosing the way, choosing to live the way God created us to live. And there's another tree, and that represents choosing a life the way that you want to live.

And that's the story so far. And next week, we'll come back, and we'll see, we'll see how we chose. Amen.

Amen. Amen.