

Back to the Garden

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to, not the second chapter, but the first chapter of Genesis.! Of course, it's the second chapter, or much of the content of the second chapter that I'd like us to think about.

But in the first chapter, you get the first account of the creation of man. And it's in verse 26. Genesis 1, verse 26.

Then God said, And subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. This is where we find the source of our being.

It answers one of the most fundamental questions that we could ever ask, which is, who am I?

[1 : 27] No other creature asks that question. It is a question that is entirely found within human beings.

Animals don't know and don't care who they are. They act in instinct, and no matter how intelligent we think they are or they appear to be, it is only humankind that asks the question, who am I? Because it is of fundamental importance to our being. And if ever there was a day when the world needs to hear that we find our origin in God, that is how the question of identity can be decisively answered.

If you take away God, then it's open season for anyone you can identify as anything you want to, because God is not in the picture.

We are only atoms and molecules having been thrown together by chance. But here is God's decisive, loving, clear, authoritative message to all of mankind, which is, you are who you are because of me.

[2 : 50] Because I have made you who you are. You find your identity in me. And so it is vitally important that this message comes across clearly and loudly to a confused world.

A world that is in darkness and despair. And a world that needs to find God to lift them out of that despair. He alone is the answer.

So that's why I want us to look at the content of what I've read in chapter 1 and chapter 2 and to explore it in some greater detail. And I want us to think of, I was going to think of four things, but I don't think we're going to have time.

I want to keep things as short as possible. This is the end of a working week. I'm sure many of us are tired. And so we probably won't get on to the fourth one. But here they are anyway. Number one is I want us to explore the uniqueness of man.

Now when I use the word man, I'm not being sexist. I'm not trying to offend anybody. I'm old school. I use old school terminology. And so man means generic humankind.

[4 : 02] If you prefer me to use humankind, that's fine. I'm okay with that. But I just am conditioned to say, well, man is just human beings. So you'll forgive me if I trade on anybody's toes.

Humankind, it's the same thing. The world, then secondly, I want us to look in chapter 2 at the work that is given to humankind, Adam and Eve.

I want us to look at the work as the reason why humankind was created, why Adam was created. He was, God put him to work right away.

The first thing he does is that he assigns him this task in the Garden of Eden. I want us to explore that and humankind's ability and the gifts that God gave him in order to fulfill this mandate of being able to subdue the world and to have dominion over it.

But then thirdly, I want us to look at the companion that God created for him. Not just as the marriage bond, but as the foundational bond from which every other type of relationship arose.

[5 : 17] So you get ripples. You get the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, and God brought them together in their marriage. But then from then on, you have every other human relationship

because you have the beginnings of community and family and friendships and every other kind of human relationships.

And once again, I think we're going to see that we were created in order to have that kind of relationship. But the fourth thing I was going to talk about is that the choice that God gave to Adam and Eve.

But we're definitely going to leave that until tomorrow night. And the choice, of course, is that either Adam was to fulfill the command that God gave him, which was the permission to eat of any tree in the garden or to eat of the forbidden fruit.

And sadly, as we know, because you'll know the end of the story, that he decided to do the latter. We're going to explore that tomorrow and what the consequences of those were.

I want us to look, first of all, then, at how unique human beings are. And, of course, when we go back to the very beginning, we're talking about our first parents. We're talking about that uniqueness that has extended.

[6 : 31] Despite the fact that we've become separated from God, nonetheless, that humanness has extended throughout all the generations and it belongs to us.

And so when I talk about Adam and Eve, I'm talking about ourselves as well as belonging to that same species of creation. And I want us to look at it in terms of the way it's presented to us here in such dramatic form.

First of all, let's look at in the process of creation in chapter one. You'll notice that there's a kind of repetitiveness about it. Up until the sixth day, God says, let there be, let there be, let there be fish, let the fish, let the seas team with, let there be animals, let there be, and so on and so forth.

But when it comes to the sixth day, there's a kind of dramatic pause, isn't it? If you read it, just as often, we just don't read the Bible often enough as within the flow that God intends it to be.

Because as you read that, when you get on to the sixth day, it's almost like God is saving the best to last. There's a crescendo happening. There's an upward movement in creation.

[7 : 49] And then at last, he changes the language that he's using. Mankind is created, last of all, after a pause, a dramatic pause, in which God rephrases his terminology.

And he says this, let us make man. Now, scholars have argued and wondered about what does the us mean?

Let us make man. And I believe, quite simply, I don't, certainly I'm not going to start going into the different opinions that some people have offered.

I'm going to say very plainly that this is the first glimpse in the Bible of God as Trinity. God as one and God as more than one. And, of course, in the course of the Bible, he identifies and he clarifies who he is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have the great privilege of being able to read Genesis 2 through the lens of the New Testament. And so we can see, I believe, quite clearly that God is speaking to himself.

[9 : 01] The Father is speaking to the Son. And, of course, there's a council in the Trinity coming together. And they are intentionally and deliberately making a point of this moment in time, this climax in creation, in which they're saying, now it's time to do something completely unique.

I'm not saying that the animals weren't unique. Of course, there's a uniqueness about them. But now, this is different. This is God reaching the peak of his process of creation.

He's not going to do anything more. He's reaching the very pinnacle of the process of creation. And he says, let us make man.

But he says more than that, doesn't he? He says, let us make man in our image, after our likeness. In other words, what God is doing is, for the first time in history, if I can call it that, for the very first time in creation history, God, who is himself relational, Father, Son, and Spirit, three persons of the Godhead, He is creating a being who is relational and who can relate not only to his own species, but to God.

He is creating a being in his likeness. There is something God-like about Adam and God-like about Eve.

[10 : 46] First time ever that's happened. Never happened before. He's creating someone outside of himself who he can speak to and relate to and indeed have communion with.

This is a momentous moment. This is a historic moment. And it is the moment when our species, who we are, came into being.

It's really important, I think, to read slowly these verses and to notice the deliberate drama that is in order to impress upon us that this is a unique moment.

You notice also that it's not simply a fiat. Remember in Genesis chapter 1, the way he creates other forms of life is let there be lights and let there be extended. I'm not trying to trivialize this, by the way.

I'm just saying there's a certain repetitiveness in it. And God said let the water swarm with living creatures and let them fly above the earth, across the expanse of the heavens. But now there is not just a let there be, but there is an intentional creation process.

[12:03] He makes man not out of nothing, but out of the dust of the ground. He takes what already is and somehow he forms the man.

He fashions and molds him and creates him from what already exists. It's interesting, isn't it, that there is an affinity between humankind and the rest of the world, the rest of the natural world.

I'm not surprised that people love the natural world. It's part of our human nature to love what God has created, whether it's mountains or rivers or trees or flowers or whatever.

We feel an affinity toward us because God's created us from this world. He's used the world as the raw material to create humankind.

It's also why it's not surprising that there is a DNA similarity, that there is some relationship. I'm not a scientist. I'm not a biologist. I don't know much about it, but again, there is an affinity between humankind and the rest of creation.

[13:18] But then God gives him a command, and he is to subdue. He's told in common with every other life form that he is to propagate.

He is to go out and to fill the earth. But then he is to subdue. He's to exercise dominion over the world. He is to do so with authority and with ability.

It's almost like God comes to the point of creation where he stops, but there's still more work to be done, not this time in creating something brand new, but in developing what God has already done.

He's to explore it and to discover it, and he's to manage it, and he's to have dominion over it. Now, right away, I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, well, I don't like dominion.

I don't like the idea of humankind having dominion because that's where all the trouble of the world comes from, is humankind rising above everything else and exercising his own selfish will on the earth.

[14:21] Yes, you're right. You're absolutely right. But that's not because man doesn't have dominion. It's because of sin. He's become a tyrant. He's become selfish.

He does things for his own good or for his own benefit rather than for the glory of God. But this is before sin comes into the world. This is what our original purpose was, to live, to enjoy.

We'll see tomorrow that God gave him every tree in the garden. It doesn't get better than that in a perfect world. But he gave him, he set before him the whole world to explore and to manage and to subdue.

So Francis Schaeffer is not wrong when he says, there is something great about man. I think we can all identify with that.

We're all aware, of course, of our deficiencies in ourselves and in others. But nonetheless, there is something grand about human beings, men and women, boys and girls.

[15:28] There is something truly remarkable in comparison with every other creature. Let's just explore that in just a little bit more detail.

that what is it about us? What is it about Adam, which is different to every other creature? Well, he's first of all self-aware.

If there was a mirror in the Garden of Eden, there wasn't one until I guess he must have probably looked at the river at some point and saw himself in the reflection.

I wonder when that happened, when he actually saw himself. It's interesting, isn't it? All these firsts that there must have been. When did he first see himself? When did he first look at himself in whatever reflective material that there was?

I don't know. But if he did have a mirror, he would reflect. But it would be more than just, well, let me look for the next branch that I can eat. No, it's a fundamental question.

[16:27] Who is this? Who is this person? It's an important question. He possesses that reflective core. He can relate to himself.

He's not only conscious. He is self-conscious. He is Adam. He can rationalize. He can analyze. The very fact that he's asking, who am I, is unique in itself.

No other creature asks that question. He perceives that there has to be a reason why the world is as he sees it and why he is.

Now, when I was preparing this, I looked up AI. It wasn't ChatGPT. It was Google. You can do this yourself when you get home.

And I asked the question, what's the difference between human beings and animals? All right? So this is the answer. And the answer was truly astonishing.

[17:27] Where did you hear this? And remember, this is not the Bible. This is AI. Right? Listen to this. If I can find it. Humans possess the capacity for abstract reasoning, complex problem solving and logical thinking, allowing them to analyze situations, form hypotheses, and develop innovative solutions.

Humans are self-aware, meaning they can understand their own existence and mental states. They also have the ability to understand the mental states of others, a concept known as the theory of the mind. Humans have developed complex symbolic language, enabling them to communicate abstract ideas, share knowledge, and build intricate social structures.

That's exactly what the Bible tells us. And how did all that come about? How do you explain why all of these features and characters exist in humanity?

It can only be explained by their having been created in the image of God and the likeness of God. And so the reason we look in the mirror and ask the question, who am I, is because we're human.

[19:04] And sometimes, of course, the process of asking who am I can lead to all kinds of distorted answers. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong.

It is entirely natural to ask the question. But then humans are built with this horizontal capacity of being able to relate to one another.

Chapter 2, we read that God saw that it wasn't good for the man to be alone. And this means, of course, that because man is relational, he needs relationship, which involves communication and mutual interaction with all, with mutual interaction of all kinds, with someone of his own kind.

And so God created another of the same kind to be a helper that was suitable for him. We'll look at that a little bit later on. Man was built with the capacity to relate horizontally.

But then, he is also able to relate vertically. Because God didn't create him just to interact with his own kind or to name the animals.

[20:21] He created him so that he could talk to him. He speaks to Adam. Adam listens and understands and obeys. He's made him capable of conscious understanding his mind and his will.

They're on the same page. When God says something, Adam knows what he's saying. Animals can only respond to distinct happenings and according to their inbuilt programmed instincts.

instinct, but we can respond and sometimes instinctively, but we can also see the world from God's side. And so can Adam.

He sees the big, big picture. But he's also able to obey. When he hears God, he understands the command of God and he has the ability to obey.

We'll see tomorrow he also has the ability not to obey. That's part of the free will that God gave to Adam uniquely, but we'll wait until tomorrow to see that. But nonetheless, it was entirely possible for him to obey.

[21:28] That's because obedience wasn't alien to Adam. It was natural. It was second nature, if you like. He was made for God and he knew that happiness was found.

The security that he had was found in God and he's of one mind with God and yet it was possible for him to take the other road as well.

So then, that was the uniqueness. What about the work that was given to man? And I'm not going to spend as much time on this, but you'll notice that both from chapter 1 and chapter 2 that both accounts, they tell us that right away, immediately, he was sent to work.

God built the garden for him and he was sent into it and he gave him the ability to fulfill the mandate that God gave to him.

He has the managerial skill to rule over the earth. He has the creative ability to rationally reorder the environment. He's got the scientific ability to explore and to describe and to catalogue and to discover features of other creatures in the world.

[22 : 43] There's a world of discovery to be had if he had obeyed God. You can see, of course, as you make your way through Genesis, the way that culture develops, that industry develops, a very interesting family in chapter 4, which one of them is called Jabal, another one is called Jubal, and another one is called Jubal Cain.

You can read it in chapter 4. And Jabal, chapter 4, verse 20, became the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. He was the first agricultural man.

Then you have Jubal, chapter 4, verse 21, and he's the father of all those who play the lyre and the harp. He's the culture man. And then you have Jubal Cain in chapter 4, verse 22, and he's the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.

We have the first glimpses of industry. mechanics. You have the first industrial man.

So it's no surprise that in the opening chapters, the opening words of these chapters, that God didn't leave man a day to himself. He is made to work, he's given the ability to work, and he is given the mandate to work and to explore and to systematize the world.

[24 : 18] And in that world, God built or created a garden, the Garden of Eden, the perfect, the place of perfect bliss and happiness.

Apparently, they tell me that the word Eden is a Hebrew word meaning delight. It's a place of idyllic delight and rest. The idea of the garden is an enclosure, a place of security, a place of a royal parkland, apparently the word paradise.

It means the royal parkland. And that picks up echoes of the biblical narrative and here the subordinate king is placed by his overlord in a protected shelter spot.

He was invited to fill the earth and every moment was joy to him. It's hard for some of us to think of work as joy.

I know that some of you probably enjoy your work and it's a great thing. Be very thankful if you enjoy your work. Be very thankful if you wake up on a Monday morning and say, yes, I'm going to go to work.

[25 : 22] I love it. I can't wait to get in because it could equally be the opposite. I saw an interview with somebody and there was this big train exhibition down in Derby last week and they asked this train driver about his work and this is what he said.

He says, if you love your job, you come to work for the fun of it. Well, that could be said for Adam. Adam, every day was bliss. Every day was just, he couldn't wait to do what God had.

It's hard for us to understand that because in a sinful world, very often work becomes tedious. It's a chore and there are all kinds of frustrations. Many of you tonight, you'll probably say, I don't want to hear about this.

I've had a week, I'm up to my eyes with, you have no idea the kind of frustrations I've been having at work and you want to talk about work in a sermon. That's just completely not what I came here to do.

Well, you need to maybe rethink work. And you need to reorient your theology of work because there is a theology of work.

[26 : 27] Remember that work existed before the fall. It's not a consequence of the fall. It is a privilege. Okay, in a sinful world, things go wrong, as they do everywhere.

Nonetheless, work is our calling. It's where God has sent us to. And if anything, even this weekend, I hope it will be a strength to us, having gazed again on what Jesus did to secure our salvation, that we go out in renewed strength, back into Monday morning, ready to do our work to the glory of God. that's what we've been programmed to do. Despite all of the problems, I know what it was. I was in secular employment before I went into ministry, and even in ministry there is frustrations.

There are frustrations everywhere. I know what it's like to fall out with people at work. I know what it's like when there's jealousy, and when there's griping in the workplace, and when things go wrong, and when there's injustice, and when work becomes a joke.

I know all about that. And yet, when we come back to it, God has said we've been created to work, and it is possible to work to his glory.

[27 : 53] So, then, very briefly, and time is fast running out, the companion that God made for man.

Now, let me just say, I know that some of you are not married, and I'm not going to make this, I don't want to focus only on the marriage bond, because I don't believe that this does focus only on it, primarily, because this was the first human to human bond that God created, from which every other relationship would arise.

But, again, there is something deeply dramatic about what God does. He doesn't just create a woman out of nothing. He takes the man, he puts him to sleep, he opens him up, he takes a rib out of him, and from the rib he creates this perfect soulmate for Adam.

And when he brings him to Adam, Adam's words are, this at last is bone of my bones, this is what was lacking, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man, therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

This was the first marriage bond, but it was the first primary human relationship, and from then there came children, and from them came more children, and cousins, and family, and wider family, and ripples, and community, and towns, and villages, and friendships, and all kinds of working relationships in which we could relate to one another and find meaning and belonging, and fellowship.

[29 : 41] so we are here for this evening. God has called us into fellowship with one another, a unique relationship in the family of God.

I don't want to say anything else about that. There isn't time. What I want to do is in two minutes, I want to talk about takeaways. how does this relate to where we are this evening?

Well, let me ask this question. When we think of Eden, and what God did there at the very beginning of the world, and what God is doing now in the gospel, and what God will one day do in bringing about the new heaven and the new earth, as he will one day, what about now?

What about this life now? For you and me as Christians, as God's people. Here's my question. Is there any sense in which we have been restored to Eden?

Or, let me put it another way, is there any sense in which Eden has been restored already? We know it's going to be restored one day. We know it's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. The Bible tells us that.

[30 : 58] But what about now? Is the life that we live now only to be tolerated until we get to heaven? Is it something to be suffered only until we get to heaven?

I want to suggest to you very strongly the answer to that is no. The life we have now, it is not perfect, it's not complete, but God has already started the process of recreation within us.

let me prove that from the Bible. First of all, let me give you some quotes. All of them are from the New Testament. First of all, when Paul tells us that for God who said let light shine out of darkness, he has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In other words, in the gospel, God has gone all the way back to Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1, and the same God who said let light shine out of darkness, he's done the same again in the gospel, except this time he's done it in our hearts through Jesus Christ.

New creation, new process. Here's the next one, Colossians 3 verse 10, listen to this, we have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[32 : 26] That's not in the future, that's now. Right now, God is renewing his image in us.

What did we say before? When God created Adam and Eve, he created them in his image. What does he say in Colossians? He's created us in his image. We bear the image of God in a new and a living way in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, he tells us in Romans chapter 8, for those whom he foreknew, he predestines to be conformed to the image of his Son. In other words, remember all these things I said?

The horizontal relationship, the vertical relationship, it's all there. It's all there now in us. God has done it. He's made us into new creation, a new creation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And so, as we come to remember Christ's death, let's do so as God's new creation in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 43] That's who we are. God's And when! And when we think about our deficiencies, as we naturally do at a time like this, we should be doing it every day, but we do so in the context of we are new creatures in Jesus Christ.

That's the first thing. Because that's what God has promised us. confidence and that's what gives us confidence to come to God and to know that He is our Savior and has done a marvelous work in our hearts.

Because the truth is that when we talk about Adam's fellowship with God, that vertical relationship that we talked about earlier on in which God spoke, Adam understood and he spoke back to God

and there was this wonderful, wonderful interaction.

We have it. Let me prove it to you. 1 John chapter 1 and verse 3. The purpose of the gospel, John says, is that we have fellowship and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

That's now, tonight, we have fellowship with the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ. Now, the first thing that comes into our minds, I guess, is, well, I wish it was better.

[35 : 15] I wish I was more conscious of it. I wish I was more obedient. Well, we're coming tonight to God with whom we have fellowship and who hears and answers all our prayer.

And when we're asking God, Lord, I want to be more like you. I am so, so conscious of my who do you think has put that consciousness into your heart?

The Holy Spirit. He's troubled you, rightly so. What's the purpose of that trouble? To bring you afresh to Jesus where there is a reminder of His forgiveness and His cleansing and the newness of life that He promises to give us.

God did not love Adam any more than He loves you. You say, I have a problem with that.

Adam was perfect. God didn't love him because he was perfect. God loved him because He loved him because He was a man after His own image. And as God has recreated us in Christ Jesus, He loves us with that same love.

[36 : 40] He did not love Adam any more than He loves us. And so therefore, in that love and in the confidence that that love ought to bring to us, we worship worship and adore the God who has created us and has redeemed us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we ask that you will bless your word to us. We thank you for who we are. We thank you for giving us not only a self-awareness but an awareness of God.

Thank you for speaking to us and for giving us ears that listen and that want to listen to more. We thank you for giving us willing hearts, repentant hearts, for drawing us afresh to Jesus.

And we pray that you will continue to do that, not only through the course of this weekend, but on and on and on through the course of our lives as we live in the light of your Spirit.

So, Father, take us, we pray, accept us, we confess all of our failures to you. And we ask that you will remind us of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin.

[38 : 04] In his name, amen. Well, we're going to close by singing in Psalm 8. We've already started singing it. It's the Sing Psalms version. It's on page 8.

And we're singing from verse 5 to verse 8. The last three stanzas, verse 5 to verse 9. You made him little less than those who dwell in heaven above, and you have crowned and honoured him with glory and with love.

You gave him charge of all the works created by your hand, and everything that you had made, you gave him to command. We'll sing these last three stanzas from 5 to verse 9, and we'll stand if you're able to.

you made him little less than those who dwell in heaven above, and you have crowned and honoured him with glory and with love.

You gave him charge of all the works created higher on, and everything that you had made, you gave him to command.

[39 : 45] All flocks and birds and birds and fish, all he's clothed, wild and tame, in all the earth, O Lord our Lord, our glorious sister name.

And now may the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with each one of you both now and always. Amen.

put it put it in.

Thank you.

Thank you.