

Sermon on Gen 2, July 4, 2010

Gen. 2:4b-25, p. 2

Prayer...

^{4b} When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens- ⁵ and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground- ⁷ the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

¹⁸ The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to

fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. *This is the Word of the Lord.*

The 1997 movie titled *Contact* starred Jodie Foster as a scientist obsessed with detecting communications from civilizations in outer space. One of the reasons I enjoy this movie is because it is thought-provoking about the intelligent life that might exist beyond our solar system. Another reason is that it features as a main character a theologian, which is a rarity. It is a bonus that the theologian is played by Matthew Maconahay, who is a good actor I find "easy on the eyes." But as I was preparing today's message, a line from the movie kept coming to my mind. Jodie Foster's character was inspired to be an astronomer by her father. He liked to tell her, "If we are the only life in the galaxy, that's an awful waste of space."

As I mentioned last week, the purpose of the Book of Genesis is not to tell us whether alien life exists. Its purpose is to tell us who God is, who we are, and how we are to relate to God and one another. Last week's passage from Genesis 1 gives us the big picture about God's creativity and love for everything He's made. However creation happened, God created in an orderly manner, with great care, and He did so just by the power of His Word. Today's chapter 2 is not a repeat of chapter 1. Instead, chapter 2 gives us the details about what happened on Day 6 in chapter 1. Chapter 1 gives us the "big picture," while this chapter gives us the "little picture" about on God's relationship to humanity.

The first several verses of this passage paint a picture of a strange kind of world. God hasn't created the plants because there is no human to care for them. It hasn't rained yet — it's hard for us to imagine a world without any rain, but even records from the Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations note that instead of rain, the earth was then watered entirely from springs. When we get to Noah in a few weeks, we'll see why

people found it outrageous to think that he needed to build a boat to escape a flood brought on by rain. Noah had to have great faith in God, because it had never rained before! /////

Back to Genesis 2. In this scene, instead of God creating through His Word, He uses a different method. When verse 7 tells us that God formed the man from the dirt, the Hebrew there describes a craftsman who shapes a masterpiece. In fact, the word “formed” is used of a potter who carefully works clay, so it’s no surprise that God is compared to a potter 9 times in Scripture. This is a remarkably intimate picture that is more enhanced when God breathes life into that lump of clay. The “breathing” here includes not just biological life, but intelligence, personality, and soul — in other words, God endowed the man with the same image of God that was mentioned in Gen. 1. The master craftsman forms a being much like Himself.

So the creation of man was not an accident, and it was unlike His creation of any other creature or thing. But since the potter created this beautiful living being, He had to provide a place for the man to live. The word “garden” here is not like our backyard gardens or even farms, but refers to lush royal parks where a King might host His subjects. This garden was a place of luxury and delight, which explains why Isaiah and Ezekiel both refer to Eden as “God’s garden.” This lovely park was filled with everything wonderful for the senses, and instead of the man cultivating them, God grew them Himself. As we know, there were two special trees in the heart of the park: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We’ll learn more about those trees next week.

Verses 10-14 give us a precise description of where this garden was located, and naturally across the years many have tried to find it. While the Tigris and Euphrates still flow today, the others are obscure. Satellite photos show a deep riverbed that runs from Saudi Arabia to a plain near where the Tigris and Euphrates meet the Persian Gulf, and some scholars believe this could be the Pishon River. Others maintain that the Gihon River could be what is today called the Karkheh River, which flows near the border of Iran and Iraq and empties into the Tigris. Where Eden was may now be under the water of the Persian Gulf, but numerous scholars believe that the ancient city of Eridu is our

best lead. Eridu is 7 miles from the Iraqi city of Nasariyah, which was the first major battlefield in the US conquest of 2003.

The location of Eden may seem like a somewhat minor curiosity that we can just scratch our heads about and move on, but that's not so. The city of Eridu is considered to be the oldest human settlement in the world, dating past 5400 BC. Near that site, clay tablets have been found that note a nearby garden with sacred palm trees in the center. At that place, the Tigris and Euphrates are so close that today, canals connect them. In ancient Sumerian religion, Eridu was the home of the god of fresh water. Eridu's first king descended from heaven, and his descendants ruled there until what they called the "great flood." In Babylonian records, the god Marduk created Eridu to be the first city, and called it a dwelling of delight.

The fact that other ancient civilizations believed that their gods created the city of Eridu does not mean that this account in Genesis is wrong, or is just another myth. What it does mean is that ancient civilizations agree with the basic description the Hebrews recorded.

Today there are some who assert that the words of Genesis must be only a myth, but a giant problem results if we agree with them. If Adam was not an historical person, if Eden was not an historical place, if the fall into sin did not happen in history, then there is no longer a need for an historical Savior to redeem history, nature, and people like us. Jesus became the second Adam to redeem us real people from real sin because the first real humans failed to honor God. If Adam and the fall into sin are just myths, then we only need a mythical Savior, and everything Jesus declared about Himself as our Redeemer must be called into question. This is another matter we'll return to next week.

So God created the first man, named him, breathed the divine image into him, and placed him in a beautiful park where Adam enjoyed fellowship with God. Many times when you see depictions of Adam in Eden he's just standing around wearing a fig leaf, but that is not what God had in mind. God blessed Adam with work to do. The language that is used in verse 15 has a sense of religious service, as if Adam is working to serve God as a holy priest. Work from God's perspective is intended to be a form of worship, something we do to use our gifts and talents for His pleasure and glory. Through work we imitate the Lord by using our creative abilities, energy, and intelligence. Work is a

blessing, and we can expect in heaven to enjoy work that is completely satisfying and utilizes our abilities to the fullest. In heaven we won't be sitting around in our LaZboys sipping iced tea. Then we will enjoy thoroughly pleasing and satisfying work, the way Adam did.

In addition to caring for the land, Adam was given the work of naming the animals. This job reflects the fact that humans are to be the stewards of other creatures, but also led Adam to invest himself in their well-being. In colonial America, many children did not survive past toddlerhood. Parents often did not name their children until they seemed likely to survive, because it eased their grief to bury little ones who had not been invested with a name. Along the same lines, if a stray animal keeps coming to your door, you may give it scraps, but it isn't yours. If the animal comes so often that you are moved to give it a name, you show that you have invested yourself in its care.

One thing commentators point out is that God may have had an additional purpose in mind for Adam's work in naming the animals. While God is with Adam constantly in the garden, he is the only creature of his kind there. The animals have each other to play with, but Adam has nobody. So perhaps through working alone, Adam comes to agree with God that it isn't good for him to be alone. Even in Eden's perfect setting, human beings made in God's image are made for community.

So as usual, God perfectly provides for Adam's needs. Verse 20 says that no suitable helper was found for him. It may be tempting to read that and think that Adam was the boss, and he needed an assistant to help with his work. But the word there for "helper" implies that Adam himself was lacking, and needed another person to complete and sustain him. This same word for "helper" is used 15 times in the Old Testament to refer to God's ministry as our helper, and the same idea carries over to describe the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Rather than being Adam's lesser, the woman is to be an honored companion because God created her as a gift for Adam. 1 Cor. 11 confirms that the woman is the glory of man, created for him as a blessing.

When God creates Eve, note that He does not create her out of the dirt, as He did with Adam. By building her from his rib, God united the woman with the man as one kind of creature, one human race. But why the rib, of all things? 17th century pastor Matthew Henry wrote a comment on this that is often quoted for its truth and beauty. It

reads, “She was not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” The word “rib” means “side,” as in one’s alter ego or better half. Augustine adds that the woman was made from the man’s bone so he could be her strength, while she softens him, because her creation required that his flesh be healed. Despite the gender difference, we recall from Gen. 1 that both man and woman are equally made in God’s image, so they share a common nature and are of equal value in God’s eyes. ///

When Adam awakens, the Lord brings a wonderful gift to him, and Adam immediately knows what a great blessing she is. What follows in verse 23 is actually a poem of joy and pleasure. He won’t be alone in worship or work any longer. He will have someone to talk with and enjoy life with. And since sin has not entered the picture yet, we have in this scene the ideal of human relations. Their relationship is created by God, lived in His presence, intended to serve and worship Him, and so is peaceful, pure, intimate, and harmonious. Their union is the foundation for human society, and the model for marriage.

Verse 24 explains this more fully. Just as the man and woman were first made of one flesh, when a man and woman come together in marriage, they leave their prior family loyalties behind to form a new family. The consummation of their marriage makes them one flesh, but not just physically. The word for “flesh” here entails the whole person: body, mind, spirit, life, will, and basic day-to-day existence. Being “one flesh” was originally intended by God to be a permanent bond, but in our fallen world marriages end by unfaithfulness and death. Even so, marriage is confirmed by the New Testament to be a kinship that is just as close as a blood relative. The man clings to his wife with passion and permanence, affirming that we all have been created to be in relationship with one another as human beings.

As you know it is terribly common today for people to live together prior to being married. This contradicts our model from Genesis 2 and in the New Testament falls under the sin of fornication. Faithful Christians should never live together before marriage, but should remain completely chaste until after the wedding ceremony. Fornication may be a common practice, but it is not a Christian practice. We also note that God brought Adam

and Eve together in Eden to work and worship together. This is why 2 Cor. 6 declares that Christians and non-Christians should not be yoked together. If a Christian meets someone who is not interested in being devoted to Christ, they should not date because they should not be married. Evangelistic dating usually leads to the Christian being pulled into an ungodly lifestyle, or a relationship where there is a spiritual gulf between the partners. This is not God's intention for marriage.

You may have heard the observation that God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. Homosexuality is a sin against our bodies, which have been created to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies have not been designed by God for homosexual intimacy, and in my opinion the homosexual lifestyle makes a false idol out of sexuality and sensual pleasure. But it is also true that we have not been created for premarital relations, extramarital affairs, and pornography. Throughout human history just as today, sexual sin abounds. Because it is so pervasive, devoted Christians must be vigilant to resist all sexual temptation, even if it is limited to our imaginations. Our minds have been made in God's image, and through the Spirit we can be disciplined in what we think, and how we think it.

So what about those of us who are single? There have been times when I avoided Christian talks about marriage because I felt as though I was left out, or somehow a lesser person. Does this chapter in Genesis even apply to me? I knew that the New Testament more than once calls singleness a gift, but I never felt especially blessed. I thought, "Why can't I be blessed with marriage, and even my own children?" Many lonely Christians wonder the same thing, whether they are single, divorced, or widowed.

While I will talk about this more in the coming weeks, today I'll close with this. Jesus taught that in heaven, we will be like the angels, who do not marry. Even though marriage here is a gift, it is temporary; even the marriage vows end, "Til death do us part." As a single person I have blessings that some who are married do not. The fact is that we all are given some blessings that others do not have, and may never have. We all are given blessings that are temporary. In this world, nothing lasts, which is why we can look to eternal fellowship with God with such great joy and hope.

What I like to take from Genesis 2 is an appreciation of who each of us is in Christ. God created males as special beings. God created females as special beings. We can

cherish who we are, whatever gender we are. Our sexuality is something very precious, even if we aren't expressing it in a marriage relationship. Living holy lives is our focus as followers of Christ, whether we are married or not. We are now part of a Kingdom in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, but all are precious children of God. God has created us to be a community of faith, and provided us with good works to do for His glory, just as He did with Adam. So whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let us pray.

Bene: Col. 3

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.