

## Placed in Eden

Genesis 2:1-17

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Last month Kerry Petersen and I visited in Laos, which is a Communist country that is closed to the gospel. The people cannot express their faith openly, but while we were there, we met a Tai Dam woman. She was a single parent, had small children in her home, and she was a believer. As we talked with her through a translator (listened to the conversation mostly) we found out that the government was aware of her faith and had sent her a warning concerning her faith. But her response was that if she had to go to prison, or even die for her faith, she was willing. Both Kerry and I were struck by the depth of her faith as a single mother with small children at home, who was willing to put it all on the line for her Savior.

You find, in environments like that, that there aren't too many people who are riding the fence, trying to go down the middle. That environment forces people to choose—either they are going to go all out for God, or they're going to walk away because of the risk of being a Christian. We certainly understand it's very different than that in our culture. It isn't at all uncommon to find people who kind of “walk the fence,” going down the middle path. As a matter of fact, a lot of Christians, if they were to be honest in their heart of hearts, would say that they don't really experience a lot of joy. They don't experience what they would consider the abundant Christian life. They really don't experience a lot of victory and are somewhat frustrated with their Christian life, cranking it out week in and week out. If you were to investigate why that is, most often it would be because we try to live with one foot firmly planted in this world and one foot planted in the Kingdom of God. Jesus was very clear when He said that we cannot live that way and experience the blessings of God. We cannot live with a divided heart and experience the abundant life that God wants to give us—we do need to make a choice.

Knowing that, why is it that we often choose not to do that? Why is it that we often choose to go down the middle of the track, even though it is a frustrating journey? I think if you get to the core issue, it is because we don't really trust God. We're not willing to jump in with both feet and let God have it all, because we don't trust Him. Why don't we trust Him? I think it's because we often do not have a proper view of God. We have a misconception about God—a view of Him that is not really correct. But because we have this view of God—this god that we have created—it's the type of god that we cannot fully trust.

Now we formulate those views of God any number of ways. We may formulate them out of the family that we grew up in or from an experience we had there. We may get these ideas of God from churches we've attended or from bad experiences with preachers or ministers or priests. We may form these views of God through bad experiences with Christians who maybe lived out their lives as hypocrites and gave us a certain warped view of God. Or perhaps just the circumstances of life have caused us to come to some conclusions about who God is. We may have formed a view of God that creates a god we cannot fully trust. Whatever the reason, it keeps us from really being willing to “sell out” completely to God.

Genesis 2 exposes us to a very significant view of God. It exposes us to a God where, I believe, if we will come to grips with who He really is and what He wants for us, we will not hesitate in letting Him have everything. Having said that, I'd invite you to turn with me to

Genesis 2 to see what we learn about God from this chapter. In order to better understand this chapter, it is helpful to know that Genesis 2 does not follow chronologically with Genesis 1 in a timeline fashion. In other words, Genesis 1 is a big overview of six days of creation, and we're introduced to the big Creator—God. Genesis 2 doesn't pick up from there and go on, but rather goes backwards into the discussion of what happened on the sixth day of creation and fills that day with details. So we're not moving on; we're actually moving backwards to get more detail about what was discussed in the first chapter.

If we were to be honest, we would also say that, at the end of chapter 1, God seems far away. God is *so big*. God is *so awesome*. We saw last week how the infinite and sovereign God is revealed in creation, but at the end of that chapter, He is so magnificent that He just feels far away. In theology, we call it the transcendence of God—that God is outside of us—He's other than us. It feels like He's way out there somewhere. But in Genesis 2, that same God becomes very up-close and personal. He becomes very intimate.

One of the ways we see that is in the use of the names of God. In Genesis 1, God is referred to in the Hebrew as *Elohim*. That means the big Creator God of the Universe, and that is the name used exclusively for God. But when we enter into chapter 2, for the first time in all of the Bible, we are introduced to *Jehovah* God, or in Hebrew, *Yahweh* God. Whenever in your English Bible you see LORD in all capital letters—L-O-R-D—that is always a translation of the Hebrew Yahweh, or what sometimes is referred to as Jehovah God. That is the covenant God of Israel. It is the intimate God – the God who is up-close and personal. So it's interesting to notice, as we read through the first 17 verses of chapter 2, how often God is referred to as LORD God, Yahweh God. Notice, too that G-o-d—that is, Elohim, is also included in that name. It is saying that this is the same God of Genesis 1—it's not a different God, but the big Creator God is also the intimate Jehovah God. So listen for that as we read these verses.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed and all their hosts. And by the seventh day, God completed his work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because, in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. Now no shrub of the field was yet in the Earth and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth; and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden toward the east in Eden, and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground, the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food, the tree of life, also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. And the name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die."

There is a significant emphasis on the name, Yahweh God—Jehovah God—in this text, which is a way of saying that Elohim, God of the Universe, became intimate and

personal in chapter 2. And what we learn in chapter 2 are three things in these verses that God wanted for Adam and Eve, and also that God wants for us today. In understanding what God has always wanted for people made in his image, we see into the heart of God; we see what He is about as a God. So, with that in mind, let's see what is there.

In verses 1-3, we are introduced to the first thing that God wanted for people made in His image, and it is this whole idea of rest. The first six days of creation, God created. But there is a significant emphasis in verses 2 and 3 that God rested, because the work was completed. Look at the repetition in verses 2 and 3 concerning what God had done, and that it was finished. In verse 2, He says, "God completed His work which He had done....." and at the end of the verse, "...from all His work which He had done." Verse 3 says: ".....from all His work which God had created and made."

Are you getting the message here? The message is that God did it, and it was finished. He didn't need help from the angels. Adam and Eve didn't do the work. Nobody else had done it. God did the work, and now it was completed. Therefore, God entered into rest on the seventh day. As a matter of fact, this seventh day was blessed, which means God set it apart as a special day. It was sanctified—it was set apart—because it was on this day that God rested. Now, the question is: Why did God rest? Was God worn out? Was God tired? Did He need to catch His breath? In Genesis 1, we see that all God did for six days was breathe out, and Creation was put into place. So don't think that it "wore God out." As a matter of fact, with God being omnipotent, He cannot be weary—so why the rest? The rest is not rest because He is weary. The concept is along the lines of God resting because the work was done, and that's the emphasis in these verses. The work was completed—it was done; and so rest is the idea that God stepped back, and God looked at what He had made, and He simply took pleasure in it. We see that in Genesis chapter 1. At the end of each day, it ends the day by saying, "God said that it was good." And finally, after the sixth day, God said, "it was very good," which gives the idea of God stepping back and just taking pleasure in all that He had made. That is God's rest.

But it's not just about that; it's also what God did for Adam and Eve related to that rest. Look on in verse 7. We're introduced to God creating Adam, and then verse 8 says: ".....and the LORD God planted a garden toward the east in Eden." So somewhere in that creation story, God created this beautiful garden—this very special place. He defines the boundaries of that garden, and He says this is a place of great pleasure. That's actually what He says in verse 9: "Out of the ground, the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing (that is the Hebrew for pleasure) to the sight and good for food." This was a place that was pleasurable to look at. This was a place that was filled with pleasure for eating. This was the ultimate environment for people made in His image.

And what did God do? In verse 8 it says "He planted a garden toward the east in Eden, and there He placed the man whom He had formed." You see it again in verse 15: "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden." God created a garden. He did all the work himself. Adam didn't landscape it. Adam didn't plant it. Adam didn't do anything. God made it all, and when it was completed and the work was finished, God took the man that He had created and placed him in the middle of the garden to enter into God's rest. He wanted him to enter into God's rest and simply experience the pleasure of it all. It was a beautiful environment.

This is really the introduction of God's grace. Sometimes we think God's grace doesn't enter the picture until sin, but I don't think that is correct. Here, in Genesis 2, we get a glimpse into God's grace. God's undeserved favor was poured out upon Adam before sin ever entered into the picture, because that's who God is. Adam didn't deserve this; Adam didn't do anything to merit this wonderful garden. He simply received it as a gift because God said that's what He wanted for people made in His image. God placed him in this beautiful garden, and there Adam entered into God's rest. God's rest means no anxiety. It means no fear. It means no shame. It means no guilt. It's just entering into this beautiful rest and pleasure that God intended.

But in verses 16 and 17, we are introduced to the concept of moral choice. Adam and Eve could make a choice concerning obeying or disobeying God. And that creates a little tension within us, because we realize that they could make the wrong choice, and all of this could be lost. We find out in chapter 3 that's exactly what happened. They did make the wrong choice. They disobeyed God, and they were kicked out of the garden of Eden. They were kicked out of this paradise—this rest that God had intended for them.

That raises the question: Can we ever enter back into that rest, or is it gone forever? It's interesting to see how this concept of rest is developed in both the Old and New Testament. It isn't long in the Old Testament until we're introduced to the concept of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest was one day in seven that would be set aside as a day of rest. It is a day to cease labors, not just to rest physically, but to rest in God. It is a time to be focused on God; to celebrate God; to worship God and be refocused, remembering that ultimate rest is only found in Him. And when Moses introduces that concept of Sabbath rest, he goes back to Genesis 2 and identifies this as being connected with the seventh day when God rested. It continues on into the New Testament when Jesus said, "all you who are weary and heavy laden, come unto me, and I will give you rest." Jesus didn't just pull that term out of his hat; Jesus probably didn't even wear a hat. Jesus was making a connection all the way back to Genesis 2 and to this concept of rest. It is what God has always wanted for us, and He was inviting people to "come unto Me, and I can give you that rest." This concept is really fully developed in Hebrews Chapter 3 and 4. Here the writer clearly says that it is by faith that we enter into the rest of our salvation. The ultimate fulfillment of Sabbath rest is to enter into salvation by faith where we, once again, are placed into this garden of grace to experience the pleasure of our salvation.

Now, think about that first garden. Adam and Eve didn't do anything; the emphasis is on God having done it. When all of the work was completed, Adam was simply placed into that garden of grace. That's the same thing it says in Hebrews 3 and 4; that the work of salvation was completed by Jesus Christ. He did all of the work! When it was finished, which is what He said on the cross, then, by faith, He takes sinful men and women and places them in this garden of grace to experience the pleasures of God – to experience the pleasure of our salvation. It's a place, once again, where there is no shame, there is no guilt, there is no fear, there is no anxiety. It's a place where we can be at peace with God and enter into His rest. There is no place like it.

Let me ask you a question. Do you find that your soul is at rest? I mean really, in your heart of hearts, is your soul at rest? Is there this place where there is no fear, no anxiety, no worry—a place free of shame and guilt—a place where you just rest in God's grace and experience the pleasures of salvation because of what Jesus has done and completed for us?

And if it's true that that's what God wants for us—to take us and place us in Eden and experience pleasure for evermore—does that sound like a God that you would want to resist? Does that sound like a God that you couldn't trust? Does that sound like a God that you'd want to hold something back from?

There's a second thing that happens in Genesis 2—a second thing that God has always wanted for us, and it's seen in Adam. It is a sense of purpose. People in our culture today are hungry for purpose and meaning in life. People go through day after day, week after week, month after month, just existing and trying to “crank it out” from weekend to weekend. And the question that arises is: Isn't there more to life than this? The answer is yes! There always has been. Right from the very beginning, God gave Adam a purpose.

There are some interesting things to notice in Verse 5. First, there was not yet rain, because rain does not enter until Genesis chapter 6. In verse 6, it says God took care of that with a mist. But He also raises the issue that there was nobody to cultivate the garden. Now, in Genesis 1, we were told that being made in God's image meant that we were here on earth on assignment. To be made in His image meant we would represent God on this earth and we would rule over creation; we would take dominion over it, and that would be our responsibility—a God-given calling to fill each day with meaning and purpose.

I find it interesting that there is an emphasis twice that we would *do* something—that Adam would do something in the Garden of Eden before the description of Adam's creation is recorded. It wasn't a case where God saw Adam bored in the garden and said, “We need to think of something for this man to do.” That's what we do with our children. Sometimes people say “What did they do in the garden all the time? Did they play catch with the apples or what?” Well, actually God said, “I've got a responsibility. I've got a job. I've got a calling, and I'm going to create this man to fulfill this calling. Every day will be filled with this sense of purpose and meaning.” And so that's exactly what He did.

Verse 7 talks about that creation: “Then the LORD God formed man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” But skip back down to verse 15 again: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.” He needed someone to cultivate it in verse 5 and verse 15. Adam and Eve were given this responsibility to fill their days with meaning and with purpose.

It's interesting to notice that this concept of work and responsibility was present before sin ever entered into the picture. Work changed when sin entered the picture (which we will see in Genesis 3), but work is a noble thing. God is not an idle God but a God who works. And because we are made in His image, we are people who work. There is a purpose for our existence. It's interesting to notice, in the last two chapters of Revelation, where the new Heaven and the new Earth are described, we're also told that for eternity we will work. For eternity we will serve God and we will have responsibilities. We won't sit idly on a cloud and play a harp. There will be a purpose to our eternal existence.

So if that was true in the garden in the Eden, and that is true for eternity, what about in-between? What's very interesting to notice in the New Testament is the teaching that, as soon as God takes us and, by faith, plants us into this garden of grace called our salvation, that immediately the scripture says we have a calling. Immediately we have a purpose; something that we are to do for God that is bigger than us; that is bigger than anything in this world. It's

something that is about eternity—it's something that will last forever. It is to dedicate our lives to a purpose beyond what anything this world has to offer. We even are filled with the very spirit of God to empower us to fulfill that calling.

Do you get up every morning with a sense of purpose in life? Every morning, do you realize that there is a God-given purpose for your existence today? Do you think about being a part of something that is bigger than this world—a part of something that will last forever? Do you realize when you go to work that it's about more than earning a paycheck and about more than building a business? Do you understand that it's about more than just living in your neighborhood? Do you understand it's about more than just going to school? Do you understand that it's about more than just recreating?

In every one of our environments there is a higher purpose, and that is to be a kingdom builder. That is to allow God to use you to influence other people for the kingdom to bring Him glory, and that fills every day with a sense of purpose. It fills every day with a sense of meaning to know you are about something that is so much bigger than us—bigger than we can even imagine. God hasn't called us all to be preachers. God hasn't called us all to be missionaries. God has called us into 101 different vocations all over this community, but there isn't any exception. All believers are still called to be kingdom builders in whatever direction God has called them. It is for a higher purpose and every day, then, is filled with meaning. Every day is filled with purpose. And every day is about something that will last forever.

If there was a God who simply wanted to give you a gift and pick you up and place you in this garden of grace to experience His pleasure, to experience a *rest* that cannot be known any other place; and if this God wants to fill your life with a sense of meaning and purpose and to be about something that will last forever, does that sound to you like a God that should be resisted? Does that sound to you like a God that can't be trusted? Does that sound to you like a God that we should hold back from?

There's a third thing in this text and it may be the most amazing of all. It's found in verse 7. I mentioned the fact that in chapter 1, God feels so far away. He is so big. But that same God is brought nearer in chapter 2, and becomes very intimate and personal in verse 7. It says, "then Yahweh, God, the intimate God, formed man of the dust of the ground." That word "formed" is very interesting. It shows up again at the end of verse 8. The Hebrew word refers to a potter forming the clay to change it from a lump of clay into something useful. If you were here last week, you saw a beautiful picture of that, as Melody took a lump of clay and turned it into a beautiful pot. But the idea of those fingers forming the clay is this word that's used. And lest we think that's only true of Adam, the Psalmist David (in Psalm 139) used the same Hebrew word to refer to us when he talked about "God has formed my inward parts, and I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Same terminology. God has placed His fingers in me. The same fingers that David said, "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers" are the same fingers that intimately formed me and fearfully and wonderfully made me.

But it's interesting that we're also told that we are formed out of dust of the ground. So before I think too much of myself, let's understand that man was just well-formed dust—until God breathed into his nostrils the very breath of life, and man became literally a living soul. It wasn't until the breath of life was breathed into the nostrils of Adam that he became

alive. And notice how that is described. The text could say, "...when Adam started breathing..." but it is much more intimate than that. It is kind of a CPR-type of imagery, where God literally breathed breath into the nostrils of Adam, and he was filled with life. That's about as intimate as it gets. And the emphasis is on the intimacy of this big God.

We understand, again, in verses 16 and 17 that there's a moral choice, and we know the story. Adam and Eve make the wrong choice, and the next thing you see is that God is searching for Adam and Eve in the garden because the relationship has been broken. Then you find that Adam and Eve were hiding from God because of the shame of their sin, and the question arises: Can we ever really know God that intimately again? Can we ever enter into the intimacy that Adam experienced with God?

Well, again, it's interesting to see how this concept of breath is developed throughout the Old and New Testament, but let me just summarize it for you by having you turn to John 20. Jesus has died on the cross for the sins of the world; He has been buried; He has risen; and He is talking with his disciples and giving them their last teachings before He is to ascend to the Father. And in the process of teaching them, it is interesting to notice that Jesus goes back to these three themes right out of Genesis chapter 2 and says to them, "This is what I have always wanted for you." Verse 21 says: "Jesus therefore said to them again (*this is the disciples*), "Peace be with you." What is that? That's the **rest**. Jesus is saying "enter into my peace, enter into my rest." It's the invitation, again, that you can experience that rest in Him. So Jesus says, "Peace be unto you. It's always what I've always wanted for you—for you to know my peace, for you to know my rest."

A second observation is when Jesus says: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you." What is that? That's purpose—that's a calling. Jesus is saying, "You've always had a job to do for me, and I want you to experience my rest, and I want you to know purpose in life. Here's what I want you to do." And the third thing is a verse that sometimes we're not sure of the meaning—verse 22: "...and when He had said this, He breathed on them." Have you ever read that verse and wondered what that meant? So what's the deal with Jesus breathing on them? That is connecting all the way. That is as intimate as it gets—that the Spirit of God dwells within us. You see, that's why Paul, in Romans 8, says that if you have placed your trust in Jesus, you've been placed in this garden that you automatically have the Spirit of God within you, and that gives life. But if you do not have the Spirit, you are dead, because it is the very breath of life.

We understand, then, why at the end of all of the Psalms, at the end of the 150<sup>th</sup> Psalm, the last verse of the last psalm, says: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Everything that has within them the very life of God should praise the Lord. We understand, then, in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church, and the Church is born, that it describes it as coming in a mighty way. It came in as a rushing wind. How else would the very breath of God sound than like a mighty wind coming in?

We, as the people of God, are filled with the very breath of God—the Holy Spirit of God! That is as personal and intimate as it can possibly get. And through the Spirit of God, we are empowered to fulfill our calling and to enter into that rest.

The God in Genesis 2 is a God that I find irresistible. It's a God that I find I want to

worship. It's a God I find I love. It's a God that I want to serve. It's a God that I can trust completely. It's a God that I can willingly give everything to.

There is a God who simply wants to take you, by faith, and place you in a garden of grace to experience His pleasure. There is a God who wants to fill your life with meaning and purpose every day of your life for something that is bigger than we can imagine. There is a God who wants to be so intimate and so personal that He fills our lives; He fills us with His very breath—the Spirit of God.

Does that sound to you like a God to be resisted? Does that sound to you like a God that cannot be trusted? Doesn't that sound to you like a God that you would like to give everything to?

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