



Echoes of Eden

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #5

Genesis 2:4-17

David Sunday

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Please open your Bible to Genesis 2. Let's pray together as we prepare to hear God's Word.

God, we come to You, our Father, only because Jesus has paid it all. He has opened up a new and living way for us to come boldly to Your throne of grace. We thank You that, because He is risen now and reigning at Your right hand, He has poured out on Your church the gift of the Holy Spirit, through Whom we can cry out, "Abba! Father!" and know that You are near. Father, we pray that, through Your Spirit, You would create and intensify within our hearts longings that cannot be satisfied by anything that is merely of this earth. May the preaching of Your Word give us strength and endurance to wait for Your Son from heaven. You have raised Him from the dead and He rescues us from the wrath to come. Teach us, Lord, to wait for You. Teach us to be strong and let our hearts take courage. Teach us to wait upon You, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

There is a distinct beauty to this kind of weather on February 1. The good news is, tomorrow we get to hear from a groundhog that is going to tell us if we will be able to enjoy six more weeks of this. I'm sure all of us reveled in the beauty this morning. However, there are probably not many of us who would turn down an all-expenses-paid trip to Hawaii if it were offered to us and our bosses said, "By all means, go." Every one of us would say, "I'm going to hop on a plane tomorrow morning." Can you imagine somewhere in the world you would want to be right now rather than in snowy, cloudy, dreary, cold Illinois? Wherever that tropical paradise might be, no matter how idyllic, sun-kissed and lovely its surroundings, there is no place on this planet that can compare to the place God created for us in the beginning.

That's where God wants to take us in Genesis 2. In 1:1-2:3, we get a global view of the creation of the universe. We see that the earth is charged with the grandeur of God. We see His

majesty and glory in the great universe He has made. However, here in 2:4, there is a signal that we are transitioning into a new section: *“These are the generations of...”* Whenever you see these words in Genesis, it is a sign that we are moving into a new section.

What we have in Genesis 2 is not a contradictory creation story. Rather, it is like Google Earth. We are going to zoom in on a particular point of that creation story. It is a particular place on the globe. We are going to go back to the story of creation, and we are going to get a close-up view of the creation of humanity.

I love to play with Google Earth at night. I just finished a book called In the Kingdom of Ice about the polar voyage of the U.S.S. Jeannette in the 1880s when they explored the Arctic Ocean. I’ve been going onto Google Earth, zooming in on all these points in the Arctic Ocean. I’ve been looking at the little islands and Siberia, and I’ve been fascinated at the world God has made.

Moses, the writer of Genesis, who was under the inspiration of the Spirit, is zooming us in. As we get closer and closer to the earth, we are going to recognize the Persian Gulf down below. We are going to get closer and see that we are in the Ancient Near East. As we come to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, we are going to come to a place where it says, “Welcome to Eden.”

God wants us to go back and see this world that He created for us. He wants us to remember the way we were in relationship with Him at the beginning. He wants us to see the world as it was supposed to be before it was wrecked and ruined by sin. He wants to take us there, but I’m going to warn you that as we follow God on this journey and look at Eden and the world He made, when you really see what Eden is like, it is going to make your heart ache. Once you have been to Eden, you will be spoiled for anything less. Once you hear the echoes of Eden in your heart and in your mind, you will long to stay. You will ache with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy. If that happens, my friend, that would be a very good thing. That is the Spirit’s intention in giving us this true story.

When you travel to a distant country and a foreign culture, you often get culture shock as you experience tastes, smells, people, cultures, values and a worldview that is different than your own. As we travel here to the world God originally created, there is some culture shock that is going to happen because there are values that are commonly accepted in the original paradise of God—this unspoiled world that He made. There are values that clash with the values of our culture and the world as we know it.

We Owe Everything to God

The first of these values is in Genesis 2:5-7. Here we see that we owe everything to God. That is apparent, true and accepted by all in the original creation. The people who dwell in Eden realize they are people who owe everything to God. That is indicated in verses five and six.

As we first look at this place, I believe the ESV has it right when it says in verse five, *“When no bush of the field was yet in the land...”* It’s taking us to a particular place on the globe that was still inhospitable to mankind. There were no plants or edible crops. Even the clouds and the rain were absent. It was just a continual mist surging up from the ground. It was a watery waste and the earth was shrouded in vapor.

There was a reason the world was not yet fit to live in. The reason is given by a commentator by the name of Payne, who says, “The point is that there’s someone missing—man. We are in a near eastern semi-desert which desperately needs attention to cultivate it.” We see that in verse five: *“When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground...”*

Creation was awaiting the one who is to be created in the image of God to come and take dominion, to rule over and cultivate it. That is what happens in verse seven: *“...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”*

Moses, under the inspiration of the Spirit, gives us two verbs here about the creation of man that are very important for us to understand. Look in your Bible at verse seven and the two verbs that Moses used to describe the making of man: “Formed” and “breathed.”

Think about that for a minute. It is very important to understand that we are people who were formed by God. The word “formed” speaks of a craftsman working with his materials and intricately designing something. God wants us to understand that we are the product of His skill and design.

Psalm 94:9 says, *“He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?”* Just think of what an intricate part of the human body the eye is. God formed that eye. He intricately designed it.

Psalm 139 talks about Him knitting us together in our mother’s womb. All of this is to teach us God’s sovereignty over our lives. We have no existence apart from Him. We would not be here if He had not formed us. The effect of this on our lives should make us bow in submission to His sovereign rule over us.

Listen to Isaiah 29:16. The Prophet Isaiah indicts the people, saying, *“You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its*

maker, 'He did not make me'; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" That's the upside down world that we live in. It is a world in which the clay thinks it has the right to dictate to the Potter.

Here in Eden, the world was right side up. Everyone realized we owe everything to God. He formed us.

The second verb is He "breathed." If the word "formed" speaks of skill and design, the word "breathed" speaks of intimacy. You have to get close to breathe into someone's nostrils. It is a warmly personal word.

Derek Kidner says, "It's a word that speaks of the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss." It is significant because it shows that God is giving of Himself to us. It's His breath in our lungs that enables us to become living creatures. We would not exist without His breath.

Think about that for a minute. Have you breathed in the last few seconds? That comes from the Lord. We owe everything to Him. In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). It is He Who gives life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25). We have no existence apart from Him. In the world that God made, we understood that. We acknowledged that. We lived under the good of that. It is not so anymore.

The other thing we need to observe about the creation of man in verse seven is that we are from the dust. There is a play on words here. The word for "man" sounds like the word for "ground" in the Hebrew language. God wants us to understand that every atom, every molecule in us derives from the ground. What are we? We are "frail children of dust, and feeble as frail." We are not invincible, yet we are beloved dust.

The Lord knows our frame. He remembers that we are but dust and that causes Him to have compassion on us. We forget that about ourselves and start getting puffed up with a sense of our greatness. God remembers that we are but dust and He is teaching us in this passage that we owe everything to Him.

How long can you go without food? Maybe a few weeks. How long can you go without water? Maybe a few days. How long can you go without oxygen? Maybe a few minutes. We are not self-sustaining or self-existent, and we should not be self-exalting. In the world that God made, we were not self-exalting, but something has changed.

God Holds Back Nothing from Us

The second thing we see about the worldview of the original creation is that God holds back nothing from us. People realize this. God's original creatures saw this. He was a God Who

held nothing back and we owe everything to Him. This is the way God wanted us to think and live, realizing, “I owe everything to Him. He’s held nothing back from me.”

So we see in verse eight that God placed man in a garden in Eden, in the East. He put the man He had formed there in that garden—a well-stocked garden. God took good care of His children. He sheltered them without smothering them. He gave them all kinds of things to discover and provided rich nourishment for all their appetites and senses.

There is nourishment for the aesthetic sense, for our hunger for beauty. We see that in verse nine: “*And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight...*” Aren’t you glad God made a beautiful world? It is not like Communist Soviet Union where everything is drab and the same. It is a world of diverse and resplendent beauties.

God satisfies our physical appetite as well. Verse nine says He gave us “*every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.*” How tasty that fruit must have been picked right off those trees. They were truly organic trees.

He provides nourishment for our spiritual appetites. In verse nine, we see that there were two trees in the midst of the garden. The first is called “The Tree of Life.” As we read through Scripture, we see that this tree is one that sustains life and provides healing. It enhances and prolongs life. There is another tree as well—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which we will get to in a few minutes.

In 2:10-14, we see rivers flowing abundantly throughout God’s creation. They flowed out to other cultures and other lands that were yet to be explored. Often in Scripture, rivers are symbols of the presence of God and the vitality that flows from God’s presence. As you look at 2:10-14 and see the geographical descriptions, you realize that Eden was a real place in history. God wants us to understand that, though there is symbolism in Eden, we are dealing with a real place.

As you see the description here in 2:10-14, think about these words from Psalm 36:7-9:

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.*

God is showing the richness and bounty of His presence and the goodness of His creation in this description. We see that He is a God of lavish generosity and unbounding goodness. He is a God Who richly provides for our nourishment and our enjoyment in the Garden of Eden, which

means “delight.” It was a garden full of delights for the eyes, the tongue, the stomach and the nose.

There is another thing He provides for us here—meaningful work. You might say, “Well, that’s not so delightful.” But wouldn’t it be wonderful to work in a place like this?

Verse 15 says, “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*” Why did God provide work for His children? Maybe it is because He didn’t want them to turn into spoiled children, just enjoying things and feeding themselves without doing anything productive. That tells us something about the dignity of work. We were created to be productive, to do something and to have a calling.

However, there is something else that is significant in the work that man and woman were called to do. Look at the words God uses here in verse 15: “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden*” to do what? To work it and keep it, or to serve and guard. If you do a study on those word pairs in the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch), you will find that those word pairs are only used for the duties of the Levites, the priests in the temple. They were called to work and to keep, to serve and to guard.

As biblical theologians have thought about this passage on the Garden of Eden, they have pondered the significance, the symbolism, and the similarities between Eden and the Tabernacle or Temple. There has been much meditation and thought about how the Garden of Eden was the original dwelling place of God with His people. We were created to live in His presence and enjoy it. As man cultivated the garden and took dominion, the goal was that from this garden the presence of God would fill the earth as the waters fill the sea and that His glory would be seen and known (Habakkuk 2:14). That was God’s intent for His creation.

I want to ask if you believe in the God Who is revealed here. Do you trust Him as a generous, good God? You probably have people in your life who, when you see them coming, you cringe a little because you think, “I am never good enough for that person. I always feel a little guilty around him or her. I always feel like I’m not doing enough or I’m going to get criticized.” You probably have people in your life you shrink back from.

Are you that way with God? Do you shrink back a little bit from Him? Do you think that He’s just stingy and ornery? Do you think He is not very good and does not desire to bless you? Is that your view of God? If it is, it is because you have adopted the worldview of this culture. It is not the way God created things to be. He created us to be creatures who trust and enjoy His goodness.

Sin is Utterly Irrational

Look at verses 16-17. What is the first command the Lord God gives to His people in the Garden of Eden? The first command in verse 16 is to eat and enjoy: *“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...’”* It is emphatic here. It is as if God is saying, “Eating, you shall eat. Be sure to tap into the richness of My creation. Be sure to enjoy what I have made and given you.” God ordered His people to benefit from the bounty that He has lavished upon them. That is the kind of God He is.

It would be like a really wealthy landowner of a rich estate with all kinds of pleasures and enjoyment, where his children can go outside, cultivate it and find amusement in it. But the landowner says to his children, “There is one thing you must not do: you must not stick your finger in that electrical socket. Don’t do that.” If his children look at him and say, “Dad, you’re robbing us of joy. You’re robbing us of pleasure,” they don’t understand the heart of their father. They do not realize how good he is.

The one prohibition God gave His people is in verse 17: *“... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* That prohibition is not there as an example of the stinginess of God. It is not there as a sign that God is trying to withhold something good from us. That very prohibition is a mark of God’s grace. God is saying, “You need to live dependently upon Me. What that means is you are not the arbiters of what is right and wrong. I am. You must trust My wisdom and not your own. In doing so, you will walk in freedom, enjoyment and pleasure. If you disobey, it will result in your death.”

It is the love of God that gives that prohibition. It is God showing us that He is our King, and He is the One Who rules His creation. Our well-being is found in submission to Him. He is our Father Who seeks the good of His children: we will be blessed when we trust Him.

Verse 17 is God saying to us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). I will be the One Who determines what is good and what is evil, and you need to trust Me to guide you in this. You need to depend upon My Word.”

To eat of that tree would reflect ingratitude, rebellion, pretention, independence, revolt and treason from a good God. After all that God has invested in humanity and after seeing a creation that is glowing with His power, radiant with His goodness and brimming with His delights, what could possibly tempt us to distrust a God like this? What could possibly take us off the trail of walking under His guidance and pleasure? What could possibly cause us to disobey and not love this God? It is irrational. It is absurd to distrust a God like this. But we shall see

the irrationality of sin in the Garden of Eden. Here we are, in a world that is manifestly fallen. It is far from Eden.

I was thinking about our own church family. I was thinking of a son grieving the loss of his own father when his children are young. He wanted to see them grow up with their grandfather, but he is now with the Lord. I think of a daughter growing up in our church without her daddy and a mom who is valiantly walking by faith, seeking to nurture her and show her the ways of God. I think of singles who are lonely and would love to have partners. Even worse, there are marriages with partners who live in a home of loneliness and brokenness. I think of a couple facing the ravages of Alzheimer's Disease; they have fading memories and things are no longer making sense. It feels like a long and endless road ahead. I think of a husband grieving the loss of his wife. I think of parents who are praying year-after-year for children who have wandered from the faith and whose hearts are in love with this world.

When I think of these friends and many more, it is so clear that we are not in Eden anymore. We are not in a world where people universally recognize that we owe everything to God and He has withheld nothing from us; He is worthy to be trusted. Because of what happened in the next scene in Genesis, this world is not the way it is supposed to be. It is a broken world. It is a fallen, groaning and aching world.

If you feel that ache in your heart as you hear the echoes of Eden and see this beautiful creation that God made, that is healthy. That is a sign that your heart is in sync with biblical reality. If you are not groaning in this world or aching for something better, it is a sign that you are out of sync with the way things God intended His creation to be.

C.S. Lewis wisely said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Why is it that we ache and groan, unable to find satisfaction, peace and lasting joy out of this present order? It is because we were made for another world. The world God designed for us is another world apart from where we are at this moment.

You are aching and groaning—so what does that mean? Are you without hope? Are these echoes of Eden in your heart and mind simply reverberations from a long, lost country you can no longer reach? Are they there to just remind you of a paradise lost? I want to tell you there is hope in Christ. These echoes—this aching and longing in your heart—are not simply reverberations from the past, they are rumblings of a distant, reversed thunder coming to us from the future.

There is another world. There is a new creation. There is a world that God is preparing for His people that will be remarkably and wonderfully like Eden, only better. Those who belong to Christ long for that world.

Finally, I want to take you to 1 Corinthians 15. Open your Bible to this passage that the Apostle Paul ties in to Genesis 2 and the statement that the day you eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you will die. Evidences of that death are all around us. But Paul says there is a resurrection of the dead. Listen to what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:42-45a:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"...

Thanks be to God that Genesis 2 is not the end of the story! Thanks be to God that what we lost in Adam is not irretrievably, irrecoverably lost because there is a last Adam. There is a better Adam. There is a new Man Who has become a life-giving Spirit. Through His resurrection from the dead, Jesus gives life to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins.

In 1 Corinthians 46-49, Paul says:

But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Here is the hope for those who believe in Jesus: just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, just as we have been united with Adam and have suffered now because of his sin and because of ours, if we trust in Jesus, we will "*bear the image of the man of heaven.*" We will be raised in newness of life to a glorious, new creation. It will be a world that resembles Eden.

As we sing about the resurrection, I call you as God's people to wait. Sometimes that is the application of the Word of God. It is not "do something." It is "wait." First Thessalonians 1:9-10 says the Word of God came to the Thessalonians in power and through the Spirit. When the Word of God came to them in power, Paul said, "... [Y]ou turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Sometimes that is why you come to church on Sunday—just to be taught to wait. You need to be told that all the longings and aching in your heart will not be satisfied in this life. Don't look to this world for your best life now. That is a lie. God has not promised to satisfy all our longings in this present world. But wait for His Son from heaven. Do not lose heart. Jesus is coming again. We will rise with Him and those aching, groanings and longings will be satisfied. This is the world God created—Eden—and this is the world God has destined us for in Christ. He is good and generous, and those who wait for Him will not be put to shame.

Listen to what Revelation 22:1-5 says we are going to be raised to and experience:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Wait. Wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus Who rescues us from the wrath to come.
Come, Lord Jesus.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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