Genesis 2 sermon

Last week we looked at the entirety of creation. We saw how God created the whole universe in six days and declared it to be very good. And I am going to give you a small quiz to see what you remember. After almost every day, God called his creation good, but what did he say after he created mankind. We say that mankind is made in the image of God. What does that mean? What was mankind’s original job?

Now we are going to shift gears and look at things from a very different perspective. We can see that in the first words. In Genesis 1 we heard how God created the heavens and the earth, but then listen to the shift in this chapter:

**4This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.**

If you go to a public university or many supposedly Christian universities, you will hear that there are two creation accounts. And yes, chapter 2 tells the same story from a different angle, but it is like a close up shot in a movie as opposed to a wide, distance shot. Chapter one showed mankind from a distance, like looking at a cowboy as a small dot on the trail with the wilderness as background. Chapter two zooms in on the cowboy and his horse, or as we have it, on Adam, Eve, and the animals.

This chapter goes with chapter 3. Many of the details we discuss here cannot be fully appreciated until we get to chapter 3. So I would like for you to think of this as a two-part sermon. And in fact, Chapter 4 is really the third part of the sermon. The first details fits that category:

**5Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, 6but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.**

Doesn’t this contradict chapter 1, that tells us God already made plants? What is the point here? In chapter 1, it says God made plants with seeds generally, and also trees.

Well, I hate to do this now, but we have to compare translations. From here on out, we will officially not be using the 2011 update of the NIV. Here is what the old NIV said: **“and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up”.**

What impression does that give you? Exactly. The editors of the new NIV have intentionally taken that out. Why? Because they want to insert a contradiction in the Bible. But this is referring to something that is said in chapter 3:17-18. After Adam and Eve sin, God curses the ground and says, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.” So the picture that’s being painted is this:

At first, there were no plants of the field. This means no grains like wheat and barley and no briars and thistles. The plant life would have been quite different. Mankind would not have had to work so hard for food. The fruits, nuts, and berries the earth produced would have grown more easily and been easier to harvest. They were watered by water systems much different from our own. This detail is only put here so that we can understand the curse God later puts on the earth, but it gives us a very interesting view into the pree-fall world. As with last week, this is something science could never discover. We can only accept it on faith.

Last week, by focusing on the image of God, we focuses on mankind’s role. Now we focus more on our status and nature:

**7Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.**

God made mankind with personal interest and care. We are made of dirt plus the breath of God. We were originally supposed to the be bridge between heaven and earth. We are made of the earth and we can relate to it, yes. But we also have a spiritual side capable of relating to God and being holy and righteous like he is. Our society needs to understand this. Our society recognizes the physical side, but almost totally neglects the spiritual side. And we need to take care of our bodies. Some problems have solutions that are largely physical, like exercise and diet. And yet, that is never the whole picture. Our body is intimately intertwined to our spirit, which is meant to connect us to the divine. And the Holy Spirit who is in us as Christians does just that.

In other ancient cultures they believed that mankind’s job was to take care of the gods. But the Bible teaches the opposite. God created us to take care of us. Yes, we have work to do, but God saw to it that we would have everything we need:

**8Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9The 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.**

The emphasis is that this was a good, pretty place. Good looking trees with good tasting fruit. Not hard to acquire. Much different from growing wheat and barley today. He mentions the tree of life because it comes up again in chapter 2, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will come up again. But first, we get this weird part about a river. It’s weird. As I read, tell me if you can figure out the point:

**10A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 11The 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 j and onyx are also there.) 13The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.**

I don’t know for sure, but I think the point is to suggest a world that is very different from our world today, yet, at the same time, it was a concrete reality, and it was the basis of our world today. Even though it has been changed, it was the same world. This is our history. This is our past. There is nothing here to suggest a myth or a fable. Quite the opposite, it expresses an ancient but true connection, somewhere in the world we still know.

The way it describes mankind’s work is different than chapter 1, but has the same idea:

**15The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.**

So our job is to work and take care of the garden. Put that together with chapter one, where our job was fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over the animals. Put it together and you get a sense of what life was supposed to be like. Work is a blessing. Work is good. We were created to work. This is why when people retire they usually make themselves busier than ever before. Work completes us. Without work, we are not living the way God intended. Not that it has to be a job, but we were not created to sit around like plants. We were made to work.

But now we come to the most important part of the first reading:

**16And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”**

Adam and Eve were created in a state of innocence. This was not really their choice. They were just made that way. But they had the choice to advance on from created innocence to conscious holiness. This tree gave them that chance. They had free will.

The human will is so important. It is sovereign. Maybe you have heard “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” It’s true. When you take away another person’s freedom, we call it “dehumanizing” because they lose something essential to being human. Have you ever been manipulated or forced into doing something? You feel horrible. You feel like nothing. Because God made us to exercise our wills. Or think of it this way: do you feel good about yourself when you pay taxes? All that money goes to help poor people on welfare, you should feel great right? Most people don’t. You were forced. But if you write a $10 check to a charity, you might actually feel good about it, because it was your choice. God gave us this great honor. Having free will gives us much greater potential joy, and the possibility of a much deeper relationship with God than animals have. But it had the potential to cost us, and then to cost God the price of sending Jesus when it came time to save us.

So he gave them a choice. What was that choice? They could follow God’s will about what is good and what is evil. Or, they could give evil a try and decide for themselves. Now understand, eventually they would come to know either way. If they had obeyed God for years and years, eventually they would see that following him was good. They would come to understand that anything he commanded could only be for their good. But that would have required the humility to accept that only God can define right and wrong. We are in no position to decide for ourselves. So they could, if they wanted, try evil out and see if they liked it or not. But God told them, do this, and you will die.

Martin Luther has a deservedly famous quote about this tree. He says “it was Adam’s church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the Word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call on God for aid against temptation.”

We really face a similar decision every time we sin. I know it’s wrong. But I’ll see if it really hurts me so much. The consequences don’t seem too severe. Other people get away with it. Friends, your and my sin is so serious that God had to take flesh, suffer, and die a terrible death, suffering the pains of Hell, to make up for it. Don’t question if evil is really evil. Don’t decide for yourselves what right and wrong is. Humbly submit to God’s will on every matter.

I have heard several parents say to me something like this, “I want my kid to decide for himself if he wants to come to church.” While we are on the matter of free will, can I say, we are no longer living in the garden of Eden. Our wills have been deeply corrupted by sin. There is no faster way to let your kids mess up their lives than by letting them decide what is right and what is wrong for themselves. You are the parents. Here is the problem. If you let your kids decide not to go to church, then they will usually never decide to go back. It is only by hearing God’s Word that we are reminded of these truths. If you allow themselves to cut themselves off from God’s Word, they will grow farther and farther away. Look how free will worked for Adam and Eve. And they were holy. Your kid’s will is now corrupted because of them. As long as you are able, don’t give them the choice if they want to come to church or not.

Part B

Our society is confused about gender. Do any of you have teenage girls? Do you want to give your daughter a 50% chance of attempting suicide. Then according to a new study from Brown University, you need to allow her to transition to a male when she asks you. What kind of a world are we living in? A fallen, messed up world.

According to another study I saw this week, if you have a friend who divorces, you are 75% more likely to get a divorce. If you have a friend of a friend who gets a divorce, you are 33% more likely. In other words, many of us don’t know what we’re doing. We’re just seeing what other people do and trying to fit in.

Well it turns out that gender and marriage have a very simple but instructive beginning:

**18The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”**

Male and female, husband and wife, were part of God’s creation even before sin. That is why we call it holy matrimony. Even when non-Christians get married they are in God’s institution, whether they recognize it or not.

Now we should also keep in mind this does not all apply directly to us today. It was not good for Adam to be alone because he was the only human. He needed a wife to have a family, multiply, and be a generally helper for him. But today, we do not all have to marry. Yet it is not good for anyone to be alone. If you are not married, you still need the support of friends and family. If you have that, you are not alone. Some people have misused this passage to make others feel guilty for being single, but that is not the point. That is obviously not true. Jesus was not marriage. The apostle Paul was not married. You don’t need to be. The point is, male and female are good creations of God. Marriage is a good creation of God.

And what is so good about them? Woman was created corresponding to man. She is like him physically, mentally, and spiritually, and yet her differences from him make her the perfect partner. We could talk about this forever. We have to be careful not to over-apply or under-apply, and to be honest I’m not sure where the line is. What exactly is it about women that God has in mind? I think we will never know fully, because after the fall we are slightly changed. But biology is certainly a big part. Women are perfect for taking care of babies. That doesn’t mean that it is all they can do, but if you don’t think the female body was designed for that, well, pay more attention in biology class. Beyond that, I think this is an issue better discussed in Bible class where there is more give-and-take. But anyway, we should not miss the big picture: Both females and males are good creations of God. We were created to go together. The man was created first, and the woman was created to be a helper. Does that mean she was inferior? No. God is sometimes described as our helper. The point is that she was to help him carry out these tasks God had given him.

**19Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. 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. 20So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.**

There are several interesting issues here. Did he really name all the animals? Maybe. Maybe that tells us something about the original creation. Clearly, God drastically changed plant and animal life as a response to sin. My personal suspicion is that the original animals had much better genes than today, and that most animals, and possibly even humans, alive today would look very inbred compared to the first humans and animals. Many of our favorite animals were probably not there yet, and many other animals we would not recognize. But who knows.

And Adam named them. What does naming signify to you? Probably not what it signified to the ancient audience. Naming signified authority. This is also remarkable if you think about it. Adam was quite “in tune” with God. He was able to follow God’s creative thoughts as they were expressed in the animals. It also shows us that his relationship to the animals was different. They were more like pets or domesticated animals, or at least that is how it seems. What God intended for us was so good, and what he intends for us in Christ is still just as good.

And Adam realized just what God wanted him to, that he needed a helper. And now that that need away awakened, he fulfilled it:

**21So 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 then closed up the place with flesh. 22Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib x he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.**

**23The 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.”**

Making woman from the man’s rib again shows the close connection. When Adam woke up, he knew what had happened. You get the sense that he was in tune with God much more than we are. And he was stunned. What did he say? She is so hot? She is so smart and funny? No, she was made just for me. We were made to go together. That is how every man should look at his wife. Look at this special creation God made just for me. And the woman can say the same thing. Marriage is a truly beautiful thing. We still retain a trace of this original experience in romantic love. But imagine what it would have been like without sin involved, knowing it would last forever. Is God good or what? How good do you have to be to think of something like this.

**24That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.** God intended marriage to be the commitment of one man and one woman to start a new life together. Becoming one flesh certain means that sex is reserved for marriage, to be sure. It also means that they now act as one. Everything he does is for them, not for him. Every decision she makes is now made with him in mind as well. Not even parents come between this basic building block of society. And sex had not been corrupted yet either:

**25Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.**

It’s hard to imagine what it would have been like in this first world. We only have glimpses, but what I hope to have stressed is how good God made the world. Being human was supposed to have been a joy-filled, holy experience of meaningful work that was not troublesome, intimate, a deep, intimate, intuitive relationship with God, and a perfect relationship with others, including absolute solidarity with your spouse forever. The world would be filled with beautiful plants just for you, and pets big and small. What a good God to invent such a good world.

Part C

**14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.**

**19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**

Jesus has come to recreate humanity in its original image. That is what happens when we are born again in Christ. Through him, we have access to God again. We are intimate with God in the same way Adam and Eve were in the beginning. We are filled with his Spirit in the same way God breathed life into Adam in the beginning. And humanity is now restored back into one big family – the church. A believers are united into one family that we should have been at the very beginning. God lives among this family and reveals himself to the world through us.

Let’s be devoted to this family. Here we have the restoration of humanity. Here we have communion with God. This makes all our other activities and associations in life look shallow and even silly by comparison. Here God teaches us who we were created to be and molds us slowly back into the image of his Son. He makes us holy again, not by our own righteousness, but by the righteousness Jesus won for us and gives us freely. Enjoy and exercise that gift, and come back to church as often as you can to keep growing into the new human God has created you to be in Christ.