

“GOING HOME TO EDEN” **(Genesis 2:4-17)**

Most of us have a picture in our mind of an idyllic place where we’ve lived or would like to live. For me, I think of the little community I grew up in over in the Rogue Valley called Williams – it was way out in the country – out in the boondocks one old-timer put it – and as kids we roamed freely, rode bikes, went swimming, shot guns – and enjoyed a kind of outdoors Disneyland. Today when I talk to old buddies who grew up in Williams, we lament that it’s not the same place. Today Williams is known as the marijuana capital of the United States – it’s like a gold rush to buy up all the farmland and grow marijuana. It’s not the same place.

The search for the ideal place to live is reflected this past year by the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled crime-ridden cities that are poorly managed and have relocated to smaller, more peaceful communities – places like Gold Beach.

Theologians say that there’s a desire embedded deep inside us that longs to live in the idyllic world that our ancestors, Adam and Eve, enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. We have an underlying expectation about how life should go – that we grow up in a loving family, graduate college without debt and get a well-paying job, find the marriage partner of our dreams, buy a house with a white-picket fence surrounded by wonderful neighbors, have healthy children who grow up making good choices, and join a church where everybody gets along and the pastor preaches good sermons every week.

We get glimpses of Eden each time we enjoy a walk on the beach, watch a beautiful sunset, or enjoy a BBQ with friends. But we’re also reminded daily that we live in a fallen, broken world full of pain and heartache – and we long to have a chat with Adam and Eve and say, “Why? Why did you have to go and mess everything up? God gave you an ideal world to live in and you threw it all away.”

Is there any way to go back to Eden and get back what we lost? The answer is yes, but its only through the gospel of Christ and it’s with the understanding that the fullness of life in Eden awaits Christ’s return to earth. In the meantime, even as we live in a fallen, broken world – we can choose to live by God’s original order and design for creation and enjoy His blessing on our lives.

As we come to Genesis 2 this morning, we’re going to go back home – back to the garden of Eden where everything began – and we’re going to see four blessings, four provisions, four gifts God gives us so that we might thrive and flourish. We’ll see how God has laid out everything perfectly in order for us to succeed and prosper.

Beginning in 2:4 we come to a new section of Genesis. In chapter one we see God create the heavens and the earth in six days, and in the first three verses of chapter 2 He rests on the seventh day. In 2:4 we read... “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.” The natural question is: why is Moses, the author of Genesis, telling us the story of creation again? Didn’t he just do that in chapter 1? This has led some critics of the Bible to say that in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 we have two different creation stories written by two different authors. There’s a simple answer for this... In Genesis 1 Moses gives us the wide-angle view of creation from day one to day seven, and in Genesis 2 – beginning at verse 4 – he gives zooms in on day six to give us the telephoto view of Adam and Eve’s creation and what becomes of them.

Another significant thing that emerges in this second account is that Moses begins using the name “*Lord God*,” which in Hebrew is Yahweh Elohim. In chapter one only the word Elohim was used – a word that speaks of God’s *transcendence* over the world – He is the almighty creator. Now in chapter two he uses the word *Yahweh*, or Lord, which speaks of God’s *immanence* in the world. It was the personal name of God. God not only creates the world, He is personally and intimately involved in it.

In verses 5-7 we see the first blessing God gives to man – the gift of **LIFE**. In verses 5-6 we read, “Now 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, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.” God designed and set the earth up to grow and flourish, but there were no plants or crops yet growing on earth. One reason is that was that there was no rain to water the crops – rain won’t appear until the time of the flood in Noah’s day. Before the rains came, God used the waters on the earth to irrigate plants. The other reason no crops had yet appeared is because there was no one to work the ground, to cultivate it, and bring it to harvest. The earth is designed for abundant growth and productivity – all that’s needed is someone to bring it to fruition.

Verse 7 says, “Then 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.” Instead of speaking man into existence, as God does with the rest of creation, God does things differently with man. He uses a combination of *natural* means – the dust of the earth – and *supernatural* means by breathing into man the breath of life. We are both like God, and unlike God.

We are unlike God in that we are created. God formed our bodies from the dust of the earth, like a potter who puts clay on the wheel and carefully molds and fashions a beautiful vessel. We like to complain about our bodies, but have you ever stopped to think about how well-designed our body is? They tell us that the human body contains 60 trillion cells, 100 thousand miles of nerve fiber, 60 thousand miles of vessels carrying blood around the body, 250 bones, along with joints, ligaments and muscles – all formed and shaped by the hand of God. God arranged everything perfectly so that we can see and hear and touch and taste and feel. Being made from the dust of the earth reminds us that we are earthly beings, that we are fragile, that we are not self-existent, but completely dependent on God.

Yet we are more than dust – there is more to us than just our bodies – we also have a soul. Without a soul, Adam’s body is lifeless – it’s just lying on the ground – but then God leans over and breathes His own breath of life into his nostrils. God – the source of all life – directly placed life within Adam and Adam became a “living soul.” The word soul in Hebrew is *nephesh*, which means “an animated, breathing, conscious, and living being.” Animals also have a soul – a *nephesh* – but it’s a different soul. We are created in the image of God, meaning that God gave something of Himself to us. We are like God in the sense that we are able to think and reason, we show emotion, we show love and compassion, we have conscience, and we are created to have fellowship with God and other people made in His image. These are things that set us apart from the rest of creation, and make us the crowning jewel of creation.

God not only gives man life, secondly, He blesses him with **ABUNDANCE**. Verse 8, “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” God places Adam in a garden in Eden. You can picture in your mind a larger region or area called Eden and in the eastern part of Eden there is a garden. Eden means “delight” or “pleasure” – it’s the idyllic place that all places are measured by. The garden is not a vegetable garden, but something like an orchard or park that has trees and plants and pools of water and animals. The garden of Eden was paradise – breathtakingly beautiful and overflowing with everything you could ask for.

Verse 9 highlights the beauty and abundance of the trees... “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.” Our minds are immediately drawn to the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden... what are these trees and why are they singled out?

We’ll get to that in a moment, but for now it’s important to see that the garden is brimming with life and abundance, and this is reflected in the trees. Two things stand out about them... They were *“pleasing to the eye.”* Part of being made in God’s image is that we are drawn to beauty – we’re drawn to beautiful sunsets and tall, majestic mountains. And we love looking at the Redwood trees and old oak trees. We love the fall season where all the colors are on display. God is a God of beauty and everything He created reflects His majesty.

The other thing that stands out about these trees is that they were *“good for food.”* Not only do we enjoy looking at beauty, we love to eat – and we love to eat good food. Every direction Adam turned he saw apple trees, orange trees, avocado trees, cherry trees – fruit of every kind and variety – pleasing to the eye and good for food. Adam had it all.

Not only was the garden abundant in beauty and food, it was abundant in *water*. Verse 10 says, “A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.” One main river flowed from Eden – suggesting that the garden was located up high – and the river flowed down and broke off into four different rivers that irrigated Eden to give it life and abundance.

Today we take water for granted, but throughout history water wars have been fought over water. Civilizations that had access to water had power and flourished, while countries that did not have good access to water suffered. Water is essential to life, and we can only live 3-4 days without it. On the hierarchy of needs, having a drink of water is more important than a bar of gold. In the original paradise there was a continual source of water flowing from Eden, nourishing Adam and Eve and watering all the trees of the garden.

In verses 11-14 Moses describes the four rivers flowing out of Eden, which gives us a general idea where the garden of Eden was located... “The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.”

The only names we are familiar with are the Tigris and Euphrates – the two rivers that flow through the modern country of Iraq. We have no idea where the other two rivers are located, and there have been many attempts to locate the garden of Eden, but since the great flood of Noah’s day the topography of the land has radically changed and makes it impossible to locate. We know that it was located somewhere in the Middle East, and my own theory is that because of sin the garden of Eden is now a desert wasteland somewhere in Iraq.

But there’s something about the garden that goes beyond the trees and the water – and almost every theologian sees Eden as the world’s first temple – a place where God would dwell and meet with His people. The parallels are many.

Temples, like Eden, were entered from the east, with the inner sanctuary – known as the Holy of Holies – being the place where God would meet with His people. That inner sanctuary was guarded by angels called cherubim, and after Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, He placed cherubim at the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. Some see the region of Eden as the temple, and the garden as the Holy of Holies.

Also, you might have noticed in verse 12 that Eden was lavished with precious metals and jewels – specifically gold and onyx – which were both prominent in the temple. Gold was used to overlay the sacred furniture, as well as the Ark of the Covenant. Onyx, a white-colored gemstone, was used to decorate the priest’s garments. All this to say, as one theologian puts it, that Eden was not just a piece of farmland, but a sanctuary where God dwells with man and where man worships Him. The main emphasis of the garden is intimate fellowship with God – fellowship that would be broken in chapter 3.

In verse 15 we see a third blessing God gives man – and that is **A WORK TO DO...** “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” What amazes me about this verse is that God didn’t need Adam to take care of the garden – if God created it out of nothing, He could snap His fingers and make plants grow, but God chose Adam to do the work.

Work is not the first thing people think of when they think of paradise. They think of laying in a hammock drinking fruit smoothies, and there’s nothing wrong with that – in fact, God wove into the design of creation that we rest one day a week – but we are to work the other six days. Laying in a hammock is great, but after a while we want to get up and do something. God wired us to work and produce and build and create. It’s as though God says, “I’ve given you the whole earth, now make it flourish, make it productive, make it useful for my glory.”

The Bible views all work as sacred – anything you do that contributes something to others is valuable and honorable. Most of us start out doing some pretty crummy jobs for very little pay. But as we work hard, receive training, and save up – we’re able to assume more responsibility and increased pay. We learn from the parable of the talents that God entrusts each of us with certain gifts and abilities, and He expects us to do all we can with those gifts and abilities as long as He gives us life on earth. In God’s economy there is no such thing as retirement. You may not be working any more for a paycheck and you might not have the health and energy you once had, but you can do something for God. You can mentor or disciple someone, you can serve in a ministry at church. God wants us to work in His garden until we return to the dust of the earth.

The fourth blessing God gives to Adam in the garden is **PROTECTION**. Verses 16-17 says, And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” Picture in your mind this paradise of Eden, and everywhere you look you see delicious fruit trees – hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of apple trees, banana tree, coconut trees – and God says, “Eat away – it’s all yours to enjoy. God is holding nothing back.

But then our attention is to those two trees in the middle of the garden – two trees that stand out from all the others, and God says, “You are free to eat from the tree of life – and if you do you will live – but you may not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – for if you do, you will die.” God is clearly giving Adam a choice – a choice between life and death.

What are these two trees? Let's start with the tree of life. The tree of life appears to be the means by which God would sustain Adam's life. As long as he ate from the tree of life, he would live. But then we have the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In our mind we probably think of a sinister, scary-looking tree – but it looked like all the other trees and was pleasing to the eye. The only difference was that God used it to test Adam. God could have used any kind of test... don't climb that tree or don't jump over that stream... but He simply says, "Do not eat of this tree."

The tree is called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In the Hebrew language "good and evil" is called a *merism*, which combines two contrasting parts of something to refer to its totality. For example, in the marriage vows we say, "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health" – describing the whole range of circumstances." In Genesis 1:1 the phrase "heavens and the earth" is a merism – describing the whole universe.

"Good and evil" is a merism for all moral knowledge – It refers to the wisdom and discernment to decide what is good – and what protects and advances life – and what is evil – and hinders and destroys life. Only God, the giver of life, knows what is truly good and bad for us, and He intended for Adam to trust Him and obey Him and experience life. But He's not going to force Adam to do so. Part of being made in God's image means that God has given us the ability to choose and reason and decide.

Adam had some sense of what was good and what was evil, but it was based entirely on what God had revealed to him. He did not know for himself – experientially – what was good for him and what was bad. Up until he and Eve ate from the tree, he simply trusted what God told him. Every parent knows what it's like to have a toddler, and you turn on the stove to make dinner. You know, of course, that you do not touch a hot stove or you'll end up in the emergency room. But your little guy doesn't know this. Because you love him, you say, "When mommy turns the burner on, don't touch it," and of course, they say, "Why not?" So you take something – like a piece of bacon – and put it on the burner and your toddler watches it sizzle and curl up, and you say, "That's what will happen to your hand if you touch it – you don't want that to happen, do you?" So your child learns, not by experience, but by trusting what you tell him.

That's what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is all about – it's God saying, "Let me decide what is good and evil – let me decide what is best for you and what is not." When Adam and Eve ate of the tree, they were telling God, "We'll decide for ourselves what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, and what is true and false" and in doing so, they removed themselves from His protection and forfeited the life God designed for them to live.

Some see God's command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as the first law given to man, and the Bible will go on to give hundreds of laws – and each command God gives us is based on His infinite knowledge and is given to protect and enhance life. The whole book of Proverbs is filled with divine wisdom and discernment for living. The Ten Commandments – with all the "thou shalt" are positive commands intended to enhance and protect life.

Things go much better for us when we tell the truth, when we don't steal, and when we stay faithful in our marriage. Honesty and integrity and faithfulness promotes life and protects us from harm. We can't go back and undo what Adam and Eve did, but we can decide to trust God for what is best for us and what will destroy us. The reason we no longer live in Eden is because our ancestors decided to live life on their terms, and every generation has followed their lead.

We feel the loss of Eden every day – the loss of life as God intended it to be. Can we ever go back to Eden to the way things used to be? The answer is yes, but it can only come through Christ, who came to earth to restore what has been lost. The first step of the gospel is to acknowledge that we have sinned against God and forfeited life. Then God’s Word tells us that we must turn from our sin and turn to Christ, who paid the penalty for our sin on the cross. When we trust Christ as our Savior from sin, we are saved and forgiven, and we become a part of His spiritual kingdom where God rules and reigns – and where we let God decide what is best for us.

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). The word “abundant” is the language of Eden – the kind of life that is overflowing with God’s grace and blessing. One of the features of the garden of Eden was its endless supply of water. Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37a-38). All of the things we long for is found in Christ – He has come to restore what was lost in Eden and to give us life and purpose and joy and peace and hope.

More good news is the fact that one day, when this life is over, God promises that we will live once again in Eden. At the very end of the Bible, in Revelation 21:2-3 we read that God will dwell with us, just as He did with Adam in the garden... John writes, I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Not only that, but Revelation 22:1-2 says, “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” The story of the Bible begins and ends in Eden, and as believers we look forward to the day when we get to go back home – home to Eden – where we will once again live in paradise, drink from the water of life, and eat from the tree of life.

But until then, your heart – your soul – can become God’s garden – where you can experience the abundant life of Christ – where you live under the umbrella of God’s protection, letting Him decide what is best for you – and where you work and serve God until He calls you home.