

Genesis 2

The Gardener, the Guardian and the Girl

Look at verse 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and guard it." Genesis 2 is all about the Gardener, the Guardian and the Girl. It is about a man who is given the responsibility of guarding the garden. Later, he shares this role with a woman. The basic idea of Genesis 2 can be summarised like this. If the Garden is guarded properly then the whole world will be blessed. If the Garden is not guarded properly then the whole world will suffer.

The suit I wore to the wedding the day before preaching this sermon and the pants I wore as I preached were once worn by the former National Director of LIFE Ministries. He went for a run one day and experienced chest pains. He thought his body was resisting his exercise program so he decided to push through the pain. He got home, then collapsed and died of a heart attack. Bill's life was a great source of blessing to many. But he didn't guard his heart when it signaled to him it was under threat. He personally suffered the consequences and his wife and kids and many others suffered also.

A friend recently went to his doctor who told him that his heart was under threat; he could easily collapse of a heart attack. He told him how to change his diet and got him started on an exercise program. My friend knows that he must guard his heart to ensure that his body and life will be healthy as well. If he guards his heart then he will be around for a lot longer for his wife and kids.

In the same way, the wellbeing of the man, the woman and the whole world, depends on whether the garden is guarded or not. Remember verse 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and guard it." Whenever you start to watch a movie and see a wonderfully happy couple you can guarantee what will happen. One of those happy people will be murdered or tragically die. In a way, this is also the case when you read Genesis 2. It seems too good to last. What a wonderful world and what a wonderful couple. Beautiful people in a beautiful world. Surely, it can't last, can it? Well, the short answer is that it could have lasted if the man and the woman had successfully guarded the garden.

Consider three key aspects of Genesis 2: (1) The Gardener; (2) The Guardian; (3) The Girl.

1. The Gardener

As verse 8 shows, the Head Gardener of Genesis 2 is God himself: "the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden." The imagery is rich. The sun rose in the east and ancient people associated the sun with the presence of a god. The name Eden carries the idea of "delight" or "pleasure." Genesis 3 shows that for people to be excluded from the Garden means to be cut off from the presence of God. In a special way God is present in Eden. The tree of life is located in the centre of the Garden to symbolise its essential nature: the source of life is to be found in God's presence, in the Garden. Similarly the central location of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolises that the source of wisdom is in the presence of God. We have been tossed out of the Garden but nothing has changed. Pleasure, abundant life and wisdom are ultimately found in the presence of God. There is gold in the Garden (v12). There is aromatic resin, wonderful smells - in the Garden (v12). There is precious onyx in the Garden (v12). As verse 9 tells us: "the Lord God made all kinds of trees to grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." The presence of God is a place of richness and abundance and satisfaction and meaning - get the

picture? Do you live your life in the presence of God? Does your life seem boring, trivial, pointless, unsatisfying and perhaps even downright miserable? You are not living in the presence of God. You need to get back into the Garden.

When the Israelites eventually occupied the promised land they encountered people who believed in a Canaanite god called Baal. Baal conquered chaos, declared himself to be a king, and built for himself a palace, a sanctuary. Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 follow a familiar ancient pattern. First, God shows himself to be the great conquering Creator-King as he overcomes chaos. Second, God establishes his mountain sanctuary, the Garden of Eden, the centre from which the blessings of God's rule are passed on to the whole world. God is such a wonderful king that to be in the Garden, to be in his presence, is to be in a place where we have everything we could ever possibly need, to be in the place of ultimate fulfillment.

God as the Great Gardener has planted the most wonderful of gardens, the Garden of Eden, the source of life, wisdom and wealth. However, God does not want this rich life to be locked up in the garden and so he creates man in his image, that is, to be a gardener like himself - one who causes life and blessing to flow to the world. The word "flow" is very appropriate because verse 10 tells us: "A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters." This river is familiar from other ancient texts and you may remember that Ezekiel 47 describes this same cosmic river of life which flows from the temple bringing life wherever it flows. In the same way in Revelation 22:1 we have a description of life in heaven, in the New Jerusalem: "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." We have already read in Genesis 2:10 of the river which flows from Eden. Remember, that in the ancient world people did not think of a globe. Instead they thought of the four corners of the earth. So, the description of the river flowing from Eden and then dividing into four rivers is really a vivid picture of life flowing from God to bring blessing to the whole world. It goes without saying that rivers flow downwards, implying that Eden is indeed a mountain sanctuary, just as Ezekiel describes the Garden of Eden in Ezekiel 28.

In Genesis 1 God deliberately begins his work of creation with a state of chaos which he proceeds to conquer. In the same way in Genesis 2 God begins with a lower level of chaos to be conquered: an empty and formless earth: "no shrub of the plain had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up" (v5). Verses 5-6 make a fundamental distinction between the "plain" and the "land". A subterranean water supply ensures that the whole surface of the land is watered, as verse 6 states. By contrast, the plain is not watered and the reason for this is explained in verse 5: "for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth." On the third day of creation, as Genesis 1 tells us, that is, before the creation of man, God did create vegetation. However, as Genesis 2 now explains, this vegetation and plant life was not to be found wherever there was earth as distinct from sea. It was only to be found in watered parts which Genesis 2 calls "land"; not in those dry parts called "the plains". The reason why "the plain" is in the state of formless and empty land is not merely because of an absence of rain but, as verse 5 explains, because "there was no man to till the land." For man to be created in God's image means for man to be a gardener like God. It will be man's God-given responsibility to subdue, that is, to conquer the earth, to overcome this state of chaos and to make the whole world a place which fully experiences the life and blessing which come from the presence of God alone.

Today, it is through us, his people, that God brings blessing to all other peoples. If we are to accomplish this then we must conquer chaos. This is described eloquently by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:5-6: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out

of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This is a marvellous statement. We are involved in conquering chaos when we communicate the gospel to people and tell them about Jesus Christ our Lord. When some people hear the gospel it as though God says, "Let light shine out of darkness", just like at creation when God overcame the chaos of darkness. Wonderful light floods into the lives of people when the chaos of darkness is conquered as people understand the gospel and see the face of Christ, that is, the glory of God. So, if you and I are to be effective in passing on God's life and blessing to the world we must be involved in evangelism, not merely lifestyle evangelism but the verbal communication of the gospel to people around us. As a church we must get serious about outreach.

In Genesis 2:7 we read: "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the land and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Why did God make man from the dust of the earth? Partly, to remind him of his responsibility to bring blessing to the world by being a good steward of the land from which he himself was taken. Why did God breathe into man the breath of life? To distinguish man from all other living beings. Yes, other animals also possessed the breath of life. However, in verse 7 it is made clear that the breath of life in man is the breath God himself directly breathed into his nostrils. Man uniquely possesses the breath of God. Genesis 2 is first and foremost a chapter devoted to describing the creation and role of man, that is, to providing a fuller explanation of what it means for man to be created in the image of God. In the ancient world the idol or image (same word) of a god was believed to contain the divine fluid or spirit of the god concerned. It should come as no surprise that when God created people in his image he caused them to be indwelt by his breath.

You and I, as the Lord's people, are only able to reflect his glory to others and be like him because God's breath, that is, God's Spirit dwells in us. So we must Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5: 19: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." The Spirit or Wind of God moved over the waters of chaos when God began the work of creation which conquered chaos. In creating man God infused him with his own breath, the divine Spirit, so that through man, God might continue to conquer the chaos represented by the formless and empty plains. "Do not put out the Spirit's fire." Ask God to fill you with his Spirit, that is, completely control your life by the Spirit of Jesus.

2. The Guardian

Remember verse 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and guard it." The Garden is a holy place and so had to be guarded from defilement. In the ancient world it was priests who guarded temples. Adam is created a priest-king, a priestly guardian of the presence of God. Since the Garden is especially associated with the tree of life and the river of life it is clear that chaos-conquering life and blessing will only be experienced by the world outside the Garden if the Garden is kept from defilement. In verses 16-17 God warns man against the threat of defilement: "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 of it you shall surely die." If man, and later the woman, are to successfully guard the Garden they must heed this warning.

In creation God is King of Kings and as such he is also the Supreme Judge who alone determines what is good and what is evil. In Genesis 1, at each stage of creation God looked at what he had done and saw it was good. But in 2:18 God judges that something is not good: "It is not good for man to be alone." Only God knows his own mind and knows what satisfies his purpose or not. It is quite improper for people to

seek to be like God in this respect. It is an obscene thing for people to be making absolute decisions about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. Only God is fit to make such decisions. God is the only ultimate source of wisdom. As Paul puts it in Romans 1, alluding to Genesis 3, when men claim to be wise they become fools. That is why God commands the man in verse 16: "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 of it you will surely die."

Later when God placed the Israelites in the promised land it was like returning to the Garden of Eden. Just as Adam and Eve were responsible for guarding the Garden against corruption so too the Israelites were responsible for guarding the land against corruption. Similarly, the priests were responsible for guarding the Temple against any defilement. 1 Corinthians 6:18-19 Paul urges you as a Christian to flee from sexual immorality because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That is, you must guard this temple against impurity. In the same way in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Paul warns Christian leaders against behaviour which threatens to wreck the church, asking, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" For us the equivalent of guarding the Garden is guarding our bodies against impurity, guarding our relationship with God against corruption, and guarding our Church community against pollution.

If you do not maintain a strong healthy relationship with the Lord then I can guarantee that there will be fall-out - fall-out in your relationships with your spouse, your siblings and other relatives, with your friends and others with whom you relate. You will fail to touch their lives for the Lord because you have nothing or very little to pass on to them. You have to guard carefully your heart and your relationship with the Lord if other people are to be blessed through your life.

It's just the same at the local church level. If we don't guard our church life and relationships against the damage which can be done through false teaching and disunity then our church will have little or no impact on people around us. People outside of the church community will not be blessed by our church. If our church is in a healthy, flourishing state and is well-protected from harmful influences then our church will be a source of blessing to the world around it.

3. The Girl

Do notice Genesis 2: 18. God the Judge passes his verdict after an act of creation: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who matches him. God alone knows what satisfies his creation purpose. It was God's great purpose that man should image him and be like him, especially in the God-like work he performs. Man alone without woman to work with him does not adequately image God and, therefore, it is essential for the woman to be created as well. Just as 1:27 had already indicated: "So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

From verses 19-23 we see how God wanted to prepare man to fully appreciate how perfectly the woman he is about to create matches him. Man is forced by God to compare and contrast every other living creature with the woman. Man can use bullocks to pull things. He can get milk from cows and eggs from hens. But there is no animal which matches man and can help him to do the work which will bring life and blessing to the entire created order. Only woman fits the bill.

Before God creates woman he "caused the man to fall into a deep sleep" (v21). Why? A form of anaesthesia for a painful surgical operation? Or was it to create a sense of mystery since man doesn't witness her creation? The main thing is the contrast

between man being in deep sleep and being wide awake. It is said: "Love is blind but marriage is an eye-opener." The first marriage did not involve any courtship, it was instantaneous and it certainly was an eye-opener, though in the very best sense. In short we are to understand that woman FULLY matches man and it is this which man sees with eyes wide open when the woman is brought to him. He rapturously declares; "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (v23). Indeed, Adam and Eve become what verse 24 calls "one flesh", they become husband and wife. Jesus quoted verse 24 in Matthew 19:4-6: You will remember what Jesus said: "Haven't you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, , and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has put together let not man separate" (Mt 19:6). A man leaves his father and mother to become one flesh with his wife. That's what we're told in Genesis 2:24. What does this mean? It doesn't necessarily mean a man has to live in an entirely different location from his parents. Jesus explained what it means. The unity of a man and his wife takes priority over any obligations to their parents. Parents must never come between a man and his wife or seek to stir up trouble between them or fan the flames of discontent when a couple strike problems in their relationship.

Finally, we are told: "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." In my experience, Christians have a tendency to treat the sexual relationship in marriage as a secondary matter. On the contrary, verses 24-25 combine to teach that an unembarrassed sexual relationship between a man and his wife is of central importance to a God-honouring marriage. In Genesis 2 remember that the husband and his wife are living in the Garden, in the presence of God, as they enjoy each other's nakedness. I know many non-Christians suffer no twangs of guilt when they engage in immoral sexual relationships. But that is not an indication of a healthy, God-honouring attitude but of a seriously corrupted conscience. Paul asks Christians at Corinth who were coupling themselves to temple prostitutes: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, The two will become one flesh'" (1 Cor 6:16). Sexual intercourse is not just an expression of the unity between a man and his wife. Non-Christians, and many Christians too, think of sex just as a coupling of two bodies. This is a great lie. The sex act joins two lives together and makes them one. Those who engage in casual sex do immeasurable damage to their psyche, their personhood and self-identity.

You and I are invited to step back into the Garden. We are invited to live full, rich lives in the presence of God. We are invited to guard our relationship with the Lord as we, along with all of the Lord's people, seek to channel the blessings of eternal life to all who are still living in the darkness and chaos of lives alienated from God. We are invited to image God, to display his likeness, through God-honouring, healthy marriages and the unity of our relationships in the church. May the Lord enable us to enjoy and channel the abundant life only he can give!