

Genesis 2:4-25 Sermon One

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Introduction: Genesis 1:1-2:3 vs. Genesis 2:4-25

In looking at the prologue in Genesis 1:1-2:3, we saw that it is a highly structured, thematically driven account that serves as a very memorable, portable, and even poetic overview of God's great work in creation. Now we are moving past the prologue into a section that has both similarities and differences with the opening account of Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 both show and describe the creative work of God the Father. Likewise, they both emphasize, in their own way, the fact that humankind is the centerpiece of that creative work.

But there are differences between the accounts as well. For instance, Genesis 1 is showing a more complete picture of creation from the very beginning, while Genesis 2 seems to be picking up the account with the story already "in progress," with the earth, and the moon and stars and the oceans and the dry land already in place. Further, Genesis 2 seems to be especially interested in only certain aspects of the opening account, namely the creation of vegetation, the formation of a special place for the people to live, the creation and naming of animals, and a more detailed accounting of how God made both male and female persons.

There are also differences with regard to some of the details in the passages. For example, in Genesis 1 you have the creation of plants and trees to cover the earth on day 3, before the creation of the man and the woman on day 6. In Genesis 2:5-7, however, you have the creation of the man before the plants and trees, with the creation of the woman coming after all of that. In Genesis 1 you have the creation of the animals on day 6 before the creation of humans. But in Genesis 2:18-19 you have the creation of animals after the creation of the man and before the creation of the woman. In Genesis 1 you have the creation of birds on day 5 and the animals on day 6, whereas in Genesis 2:18-20 you have the creation of birds and animals at the same time. And there are other differences as well. The point is this: these differences have sent God's people searching for a way to understand how these chapters relate to one another.

Now, before you get too worried, let me just remind you that none of this is new. These matters have been discussed and hypothesized about for quite some time in the church. And these two passages have, historically, been approached and accounted for in various ways by different Bible scholars.

Within the Reformed tradition, among those who hold to the complete authority and reliability of the Bible, there are essentially two positions worth considering. The first we will call the “traditional view.” And this approach, simply put, says that the apparent differences between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are just that: apparent. When you look at them more closely, the differences can be explained or, at the very least, minimized.

So, for example, in this view scholars take the position that the reference to “days” in Genesis 1 is intended to mean a 24-hour period of time, and that the sequence of creation presented there is intended to be understood as a chronological sequence. As a result, when you get to something like Genesis 2:5-9, which seems to be describing a different order of things (e.g., humans before vegetation), many scholars take the view that this is only describing the sequence of events in the garden of Eden, and not the sequence for creation as a whole, which was established earlier in Genesis 1. These same scholars then proceed, in a similar fashion, to explain the other apparent discrepancies, both within Genesis 1 itself and between Genesis 1 and 2, by looking very closely at the original language (Hebrew) and pointing out subtle distinctions that are not immediately apparent in the English translation, but which may account for the discrepancies.¹

Over against that approach is the “framework view.” This is the view that, while God certainly could have created the world in six 24-hour days and in the exact sequence described in Genesis 1, the reality is that Genesis 1 was never intended to be read that way. When we force a kind of modernistic, scientific reading on this thematic, obviously highly structured, and somewhat poetic account, we treat it in a way that would have been foreign to the thinking and intention of the writer of Genesis.

Consider the rhyme: “Thirty days hath September, April, June and November, all the rest have thirty-one, except February ...” Imagine that after my mother taught me that rhyme, I walked away saying to myself, “Right, so September is the first month, which is followed by April, then June, then November; and February is the last month.” That would be a misunderstanding and misuse of the rhyme. My mother ignored chronological sequence in order to present a useful way of remembering other truths about the months of the year.

¹ John Currid, who is on the faculty at RTS Jackson, does a good job of this.

In a similar fashion, if the purpose of the Genesis prologue was to communicate the perfection of God's creation, the superiority and uniqueness of God over against other false gods, and the wisdom and breadth of his creation, then we misread the prologue when we force it into a strictly scientific, chronological mold.²

Now, I'm not going to go into all the various ways different scholars demonstrate and explain their positions over against the other one. But I will tell you that both of these approaches share some common convictions and goals. Scholars in both camps would defend to the death the essential historical nature of Genesis 1 and 2. Both camps argue that Genesis 1 and 2 convey essential, undeniable historical realities that are affirmed later in Scripture. These realities include the conviction that the universe is a creation and not an accident; that God is the unique and all-powerful and ever-present cause of that creation; that human beings did not just appear as the result of a random, evolutionary process but are a deliberate creative work of God; that people are unique from animals because they alone bear the image of God; that Adam and Eve are not mythical names of imaginary people but real names of real people who lived in a real garden and fulfilled a specific role in the history of God's purposes here on earth. Reformed, Evangelical scholars from both traditional and framework perspectives affirm these things because both hold to the absolute authority and reliability and accuracy of the Scriptures. They both agree *that* these two chapters work together; they differ only in their understanding of *how* these chapters work together.

One thing that keeps scholars in both camps working to clarify the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 is that these two passages appear back to back. These two accounts of the creation are written from different perspectives and with different emphases. Yet the author, who would have understood and seen these things better than we can, apparently had no problem placing them together just as they are. Apparently, he neither saw nor felt great tension between them. He saw no reason to edit one chapter so that it fit more smoothly with the other. He saw no reason to blend the two into one account that was a more complex and harmonious whole. He wrote them as they are, and placed them next to one another. And this fact speaks volumes. It forces us to wrestle with these texts until we understand how they work together, until our understanding matches the author's understanding.

My own view is that the framework approach is more helpful in this regard. I believe it does a better job of answering the questions raised, is more consistent in how it handles texts, and fits better with the overall structure of Genesis. At the same time, I have very good friends, some of them much smarter than I, who would make the same statements about the traditional view. We both agree that

² Mark Futato, who is on the faculty of RTS Orlando, does a good job explaining and describing this sort of "framework" view.

the passages are consistent with one another. We disagree only on how that consistency is displayed.

God and His Image

After the sweeping account of the creation of all things presented in the prologue, Genesis 2:4-25 focus our attention on a specific aspect of creation: the creation of human beings as the center of God's creative work. Looking at this section as a whole, we see that from the very beginning, it was the Creator's desire, in his great generosity and kindness, to live in relationship with people who are in his image, in the midst of a beautiful and abundant world created for his and their enjoyment.

The picture painted here is the picture of a perfect world, of a great and beautiful world, a world brimming with life and abundance. And there, in the midst of that world, managing it and looking after it are two people who perfectly reflect the image of their Creator, who live in complete harmony with God, with each other, with the all the other creatures, and with the creation itself, the world that God prepared for them. It is a truly idyllic scene, a snapshot, if you will, of the kingdom of God functioning as it was intended to function: God's people in God's place under God's kind and benevolent rule.

In highlighting these things, the writer of Genesis gives us a picture of what was and is. And this paves the way for us to understand what was lost. It helps us gain some sense of how very great was the Fall. To put it another way, Genesis 2 is the bright backdrop that helps us see the darkness of Genesis 3 for what it truly is. Let's take a look at a few elements within this passage show the goodness and generosity of God, and the greatness and bounty of his creation, and so set us up for the account that follows.

1. Life

One of the first illustrations of the goodness and generosity of God is seen in Genesis 2:5-7 in the creation of human beings. Out of sheer grace and kindness, and not out of any deficiency or lack, God condescended to create a world and to place human beings in that world, endowing them with his image and animating them with the breath of life. In a prior study, we looked at what it means to be created in the image of God. But what I want you to see in this re-telling of the creation of man is that the God is the giver of life, and that this is one of his defining characteristics.

So, it should come as no surprise that this same characteristic can be found when we flip to the other end of the Bible and look at the person and work of the

Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, Paul defended and explained the resurrection of Christ. And in doing this, he connected the ministry of Christ explicitly to the events of Genesis 2:

Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, 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 are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul deliberately drew on the imagery of Genesis 2, with the Creator God as the giver of Life, to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is that same life-giving spirit. The first man was given the breath of life and was endowed with natural life from the Creator, and became a procreator of natural life. In the same way, Jesus, the last Adam, is endowed with life and is also the source of life to others. But the life he gives is not mere natural life; it is spiritual life, eternal life. Jesus became "a life giving spirit," the source and originator of all spiritual life. Thus, he can guarantee that all those who are in him are in possession of eternal life, and have only to look at the Lord Jesus Christ to know what their own future and hope is beyond the grave (cf. John 20:22). In summary, in Genesis 2, we see God as the giver of life, and the New Testament echo of that is that Jesus is the life-giving Spirit.

2. Material Needs and Beauty

In addition to giving humans the breath of life, we see in Genesis 2:8-10 that God graciously and abundantly provided for the physical or material needs of his people. After creating the man, God placed him in a garden created specially for him. And in that garden, God caused all sorts of lovely trees and plants to grow as sources of food for the man he had created.

But these plants and trees were not just sources of food; they were also sources of beauty and aesthetic delight. The text says that God provided more than a few good trees. According to Genesis 2:9, every tree in the garden was "pleasant to the sight and good for food." In short, we see the lavish, abundant provision of God. God did not just give the bare essentials so that his creatures could scrape by. Instead, he pulled out all the stops, spared no expense, went to great lengths to create this amazing garden that was as pleasing to the eyes as it was to the palate.

And, just as before, the image here of God as the source and provider of all good things for his people can be traced from this point forward until we see it fully

evident in the New Testament in the Lord Jesus Christ. We see a further illustration of God's provision for his people in the account of the manna that was provided, despite their sin, in the midst of a barren wasteland. We see it later as God, through Moses, led his people through that wasteland up to a Land of Promise — an abundant land described "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). We see it in Jesus' earthly ministry, which was launched in a miraculous way while he was attending a feast, turning water into wine, and later included the miracle of turning a child's sack lunch into a meal for thousands, with armloads to spare. We see it still further in Jesus' statement that he is the "bread from heaven" (John 6:32), that he is the food that will satisfy their souls, that he is the water that will quench their thirst (John 6:35), that he came that his sheep might "have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

This same Jesus assures all those that are his that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. And when we, with John, pull back the veil of heaven just a bit in Revelation 22, we find, in admittedly picturesque language, that we have come full circle. There, in the city of God, the "New Jerusalem," stands once again the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, open and eternally accessible to the citizens of the heavenly kingdom to enjoy.

3. Work and Marriage

In addition to the highlighting the gracious gifts of life and beauty and abundance, Genesis 2 speaks of other provisions God made for his people in their perfect world. In Genesis 2:15 we see that God gave the man work — meaningful labor, a significant task and purpose that the man might perform for the glory and pleasure of the Creator. In Genesis 2:18ff., we also see that God provided companionship for the man, fashioning a woman who also bore the Creator's image. The woman was created to live in relationship with the man and with her Creator, and to work alongside the man in the perfection of the garden. Both work and marriage demonstrate the goodness and generosity of God, and the beauty of a creation where everything is as everything is supposed to be.

4. Two Trees

The last demonstration of the goodness of God that we will mention is really one of the most significant things being said in Genesis 2: the provision of the two special trees and the instructions regarding one of them (Gen. 2:9,15-17). Now, what's going on with the trees, and with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in particular? What does that all mean? Well, simply put, the trees are God's billboard. Placed in the midst of the garden, much like a billboard is placed in a prominent position beside a main road, and with a similar sort of purpose: to tell

you something you need to know, to remind you of something that you are never, never, never to forget.

What is it that God's creature — this man — is never to forget? He is never to forget that there is a God, and that man is not God. How does the tree communicate this? Because every time the man sees it, he remembers that out of all the lush and beautiful things God has provided in the garden, there is this one thing that is also lush and beautiful, but that is out of bounds for man. And as he remembers *that* it is out of bounds, he remembers *why* it is out of bounds: because God said so.

Even paradise cannot exist without boundaries, without reminders of who is the Creator and who is the creature. And understanding this reality helps us to understand the meaning of the name of this particular tree: "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." It was not called this because when you ate of it, you suddenly became aware, for the first time, that things like "good" and "evil" exist. The man already knew that, indeed, he must have known it. At the very least, he knew that leaving the tree alone was good and taking from the tree was forbidden, and therefore bad or evil. He must have known at least that, or God's instructions to him would have made no sense.

So, what is this "knowledge of good and evil" that the serpent, during his temptation (Gen. 3:5), quite rightly said would make the man and the woman like God in a way they were not already like him? It's this: To this point, their knowledge of good and evil was all from the side of the rule-keeper; they knew good and evil because it was pointed out to them. That sort of knowledge was permitted to them, and was even necessary for them.

But what was forbidden to them was the knowledge of good and evil as rule-makers. What was out of bounds for them was, as Hamilton puts it, "the power to decide for themselves what is in their best interests or not." When the man discarded God's instructions and took the fruit, he attempted to know good and evil by making himself the moral center of the universe, that is, by defining good and evil by his own choices and decisions.

As long as the man and woman were in the garden, there were certain kinds of knowledge that they were not to seek and not to possess. There were things that they had the ability but not the right to know. They were to be content in God's provision, content in the understanding that amidst the amazing provision of God there was this one thing that was withheld from them. And so, from the very beginning, in the midst of this paradise, man found his truest and best self living under the benevolent and kind authority of God.

And notice here that this law of God, this prohibition of God, comes to the man not as the basis of his relationship with the Creator, but *on* the basis of his

relationship with the Creator. He was already a child of God by the sheer grace and mercy of God alone, by virtue of the fact that God created him. He was already the amazing beneficiary of the great generosity of God. Indeed, this would become the very point of testing, the very thing that questioned by the serpent in Genesis 3.

And as we take this reality and trace this line through the Scriptures, we arrive at Mt. Sinai, with the people of God under Moses, receiving the commandments — again, not as the basis for their relationship but *on* the basis of their relationship with God. And the commandments performed, among other things, the same function as the one command in the garden: they were signposts reminding God's people that there is a God, that they were not him, and that life and peace awaited those who recognized God's kind authority. And yet they, as inheritors of Adam and Eve's own fall, continually stumbled at this very point.

And the question is raised, and continues to be raised throughout the remainder of the Old Testament: Will God's people *ever* be able to live as his people, recognizing his rightful rule and authority, and regain the paradise that was lost, the paradise of Genesis 2? And the answer that comes is: "yes, they will," and indeed, "yes, they have," in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the second Adam, the true and faithful Son, the true Israelite, who humbled himself, submitting to the authority of his Father, being obedient "even unto death" (Phil. 2:8).

Conclusion

Now, of course, the people in Moses' day, the people of God who first received this account, would not and could not have known all these things as they stood on that side of the cross, poised to take the land promised to them. But they certainly would have seen in this account the picture of the world as it was meant to be: God's people in God's place under God's authority and rule. And they would have been encouraged that the same God who created a world like that and for that purpose was now leading them forward into a land that was to be, in a shadowy sense, something like that: a land of rest and promise and abundance, a land where they could be his people and he could be their God, a land where they would not have two trees but two tablets of the law serving the same function, reminding them in various and particular ways of who they were and who God was.

And we, who stand on their shoulders, who see further than they could see, how much more should we be encouraged by these realities? We live on the other side of the curse, to be sure, but we also live on this side of the cross. We can see the way God has made to restore his fallen creatures and renew his fallen creation. We see how Christ, who has gained the kingdom of heaven for us, is the leading edge of this great restoration of God's fractured cosmos. We can see that great hope before us and can rejoice at Paul's words in Romans 8:19ff.:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.