

Genesis 2.4-17 Sermon / COB / 08.23.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Garden]** If you could live anywhere in the world and do any kind of work there and be assured that you would do it exceedingly well and have lots of time and money for leisure and fun, where would you go and what would you do? I won't have you call out today, just take a moment to think that over.
- Our lives are complex, complicated; even those of us who love life would admit that the pace is hectic, the important decisions numerous, our activities so varied they pull us in all directions. The pressure drives many of us to caffeine addiction to get going, adrenaline addiction to keep going, and then anti-anxiety drug dependence to calm back down.
 - What if it were simpler? What if you could have every blessing imaginable, without the pressure? What if you could wake up to a gorgeous natural setting, and you could talk with God, even hear him answer, as you accomplished work you found fulfilling and enjoyable, after which you could pursue your favorite fun activities? Can you imagine such a life?
 - Did any of you watch the television show, *Magnum PI*? Thomas Magnum was a private investigator, but that was just for ready cash. His main job was to protect a three acre, \$15MM, waterfront estate in Hawaii. Since the estate already had a caretaker and two trained attack dogs, basically Magnum paid for his use of the beach bungalow and Ferrari by hanging out on the lush estate, where he could swim, kayak, and run on the beach. If that got boring, he could hang out at the beachfront club his friend ran, drinking beer and flirting with pretty women.
 - For most single men, that would sound close to paradise. Do you know the origin of our word "paradise"? Hebrew had a word [פֶּרְדִּים] which meant "enclosure," but our concept comes from the Greek παράδεισος, which meant "garden." When the Jews translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, they called the Garden of Eden, "Paradise."
- † Open your Bible to Genesis 2.4; that's page 4 in the pew Bibles. We will read a few verses, I will clarify a couple of things, we will read on, then we will discuss the big ideas at the end. [handouts]

[Slide 2: 2.4-6] Genesis 2.4-6 NET: This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created— when the LORD God made the earth and heavens. Now no shrub of the field had yet grown on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. Springs would well up from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.

- † This is some early state of the earth, but as we learned a few weeks ago, God then shaped the earth, created plants on the land, and created animals for the sea, sky, and land.
- † Up until now, God has been referred to as [אֱלֹהִים] in Hebrew, which means "God." Now we see a new designation: "LORD God," in our English Bibles, "Yahweh God" is the idea in Hebrew. Yahweh is the name God gave himself [Exodus 3.14-15]. We have discussed before why English Bibles translate God's name as "LORD," all in capitals. If you want to know more, talk with me later.

[Slide 3: 2.7-9] Genesis 2.7-9 NET: The LORD God formed the man from the soil of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The LORD God planted an orchard in the east, in Eden; and there he placed the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow from the soil, every tree that was pleasing to look at and good for food. (Now the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the orchard.)

- † With plant and animal life about to start spreading over the whole earth, God planted a special garden in one spot. The NET calls it an “orchard” because it was a garden filled with trees, which were both beautiful and part of God’s provision of food.
 - We are not certain what the name “Eden” means, but the best guess is that it comes from the root meaning pleasure or delight; Eden was a garden paradise.
 - Notice, God had not created woman yet. Today we will be looking at God’s initial relationship with just the very first person, Adam, during the first day of Adam’s life.
 - The garden was part of God’s provision, his equipping: he created the perfect environment for people to thrive as God’s representatives, as his image.

[Slide 4: 2.10-14] Genesis 2.10-14 NET: Now a river flows from Eden to water the orchard, and from there it divides into four headstreams. The name of the first is Pishon; it runs through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is pure; pearls and lapis lazuli are also there). The name of the second river is Gihon; it runs through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris; it runs along the east side of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

- † This digression emphasizes the blessing on the garden and the earth, with ample supply of water for vegetation, animal life, and people.
 - I did research on these rivers and whether we can figure out where Eden was located. There is no way of knowing for sure. The names Pishon, Havilah, Gihon, and Cush are all obscure in reference, either referring to multiple places or not appearing elsewhere in ancient literature.
 - The Tigris and Euphrates suggest the garden was in Turkey, where these rivers begin, or near the Persian Gulf in Iraq, where they end. But we don’t know how the course of these rivers changed during the flood of Noah, which happened between the time of these events and when Moses wrote Genesis. If Eden was where the rivers begin today, that would be a mountain setting.
 - I could imagine that! Forest, orchards, flowers, mountains, a lake feeding the rivers, all with pure air, pure water, and no insects bothering you, because this is before the earth was cursed! What a dream to live in such a paradise!

[Slide 5: 2.15-17] Genesis 2.15-17 NET: The LORD God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it. Then the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die.”

- † In ancient near eastern myths, there were stories of magical plants that could give life, kind of a “fountain of youth” idea. The Bible makes clear that life comes from God; but God put a “tree of life” in the middle of the garden, which apparently would empower physical life [3.22-24].

- Did this tree preserve physical life so long as one ate of it, or provide for eternal physical life on Earth? I don't know! Losing access to the tree is not what caused death, even if eating of it could have prevented death.
- † “The knowledge of good and evil” is idiom in the Old Testament, referring to formulating a judicial decision. This tree would awaken in people the desire and ability to decide what they should do.
- That, however, was God's prerogative; people were to trust God's decisions, not autonomously make their own moral choices. The only moral choice God had given Adam was whether to obey or rebel; if people rebelled by eating this fruit, they would be seeking to act as gods themselves.
 - This rebellion would not necessarily lead to *immediate* death, but it would lead to *certain* death, both physically and spiritually. The phrase “you will surely die” in the Old Testament implies God will bring death upon you.

Middle Circle Submission

- † **[Slide 6: circles]** That's our text and its background information. Now let's pull some meaning from it. I hope you remember our three circle paradigm from Genesis 1.
- In Genesis 1, we learned that the Bible and indeed all of life is about God, the unique, eternal, creator and sustainer of the universe. And we learned that God created people in his image, so we would reflect God's character, represent God on Earth, multiply God's image throughout the earth, and rule all creation in God's name.
 - God equipped people for this role as his image with spiritual awareness, higher intellectual powers, the Sabbath day for rest and reconnection with God, and with the garden paradise.
 - Genesis 1 emphasized the authority which we received from God, to be the middle circle ruling creation in God's name. Genesis 2 emphasizes God's authority over us, that we are the weaker power in a covenant relationship with a substantially greater power named Yahweh, our God.
- † **[Slide 7: Isaiah]** In v.7, we are reminded that our species has not existed eternally, nor are we all powerful. Rather, God, the eternal and all powerful one, formed the first person out of dirt and breathed life into him.
- **Isaiah 64.8 NET: Yet, LORD [Yahweh], you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the product of your labor.**
 - About two years ago we learned in a sermon that the New Testament Greek word for worship, προσκυνέω, means to prostrate yourself on the ground with an attitude of acknowledged dependence and submissive obedience. Our place in this universe is to depend on and submit to God, to trust and obey. Keep that in mind as we go on today, it is key information.
- † **[Slide 8: Adam]** In v.7, there is a kind of poetic word play [assonance]. V.7 says “**God formed the man [אָדָם] from the soil of the ground [הָאָרֶץ]...**” Have you ever known someone who named his dog “dog”? God named the first man “Man,” which in Hebrew sounds like “Adam.” But more interesting is where the word man comes from, the Hebrew word meaning “ground,” “land,” or “Earth.” In essence, the Bible says God formed the earthling from the earth.

- And God gave the earthling a natural body for his natural existence on Earth. Many cults and other religions argue that our body is sinful while our soul is pure, but Adam had a pure physical body; and as we will discuss in future weeks, we now have corruption in our souls.
 - By the way, in case you are wondering about the historicity of this, the apostle Paul verified that the historical Adam was the first person created by God [1 Corinthians 15.45] and Jesus verified the historicity of Adam and Eve coming together in marriage [Matthew 19.5].
- † The emphasis in v.7 is that God is the supreme being; God created Adam out of the dirt; and this should remind us that we are nothing compared to God.
- God puts us in the middle circle, he grants to us the validation and authority to be his image – to reflect his character, represent him, multiply his image, and rule over creation in his name – but without God’s grace, we would be dirt; our whole species would be literal dirt without the breath of life God gave us, and we as individuals would be worth dirt, or at least no better than anything else in creation [the bottom circle] without the blessing of God.
 - So it should be obvious that God’s plan was for people to depend on God and submit to God, to trust and obey God.

Task in the Garden

- † **[Slide 9: 2.8]** V.8: God planted a garden and put Adam into it.
- God provided fresh water and food, he provided the paradise garden, he provided the Sabbath day of rest, he provided direct communication with himself, and he provided [or equipped] Adam with everything he needed internally to fulfill his role as God’s image bearer, as God’s representative.
- † **[Slide 10: 2.15]** In v.15 we find the purpose statement: God put Adam into the garden to care for it and maintain it.
- The garden was not magic, it did not look after itself. The NET switches the verb order for some reason, but the Hebrew suggests Adam was placed in the garden to “work” it and “watch over it.” The verb for watching over or keeping the garden, [שָׁמַר] in Hebrew, has a root that means to care for something even to the point of protecting it.
 - We should note there was work in paradise; there was work before the curse. And why not? God described creation as *his* work, and he made people in *his* image, so of course people would work. Eden as paradise was not a place of unending leisure – we need to get that image out of our minds, because it distorts our perspective on work – Eden was a place for people to reflect God’s character, represent God, multiply God’s image, and rule over creation in God’s name.
- † **[Slide 11: 2.16-17]** In vv.16-17, we see that God gave Adam ample provision and permission: he could eat from any tree in the garden except one. So Adam had great freedom and blessing, and only one prohibition.
- God did his part to empower Adam in the garden. Adam was to do what God said and trust God with everything else. Adam needed to trust and obey.

Three circles implies top line bottom line

- † **[Slide 12: 3 circles]** Trust and obey; do what God says and trust him with everything else. This is the base morality or philosophy which God gave to Adam.
- We said before that we could represent the original relationship between God and people with the three circles diagram: God is in the top circle, he remained in authority over everything, including the human family. But God made the human family in his image, to reflect God's character as they lived, to represent God in all situations, to multiply the image of God throughout the Earth, and to rule over creation in God's name, in the middle circle.
 - The three circles also reflect the moral philosophy we are discussing today: Adam, the human family, as the middle circle, was to depend on God and submit to God; people were to trust God for everything they needed and obey God in everything he commanded; they were to trust and obey, do what God says and trust God with everything else.
 - **[Slide 13: Matthew 6]** Nothing has changed in this regard: Jesus reiterated this basic moral philosophy in his sermon on the mount in **Matthew 6.31-33 NET: "So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** I.e. seek to represent God and reflect his character, and trust God to provide all you need. The way God set things up for Adam is the same as Jesus taught for us!
- † **[Slide 14: Top Line]** Now I want to introduce another graphic to represent this moral philosophy, which will help us later to understand what happens in our biblical narrative. I call this "Top Line / Bottom Line." Most of you have seen this before, but it will be new to some of you.
- God has placed Adam in the garden with a mandate to do certain things to be God's image. God expects Adam to live on the "top line," obeying God's commands and trusting that God will give him whatever blessing he needs.
 - The alternative is that Adam could live on the "bottom line," he could make his own choices, he could trust in his own judgment and seek to take care of his own needs.
 - This is the only moral decision Adam has: to trust and obey God or trust and obey himself. The bottom line, obviously then, is sinful: even if Adam does nothing in particular we would call sin, it is sinful because he is not trusting or obeying God when he chooses to take things into his own hands on the bottom line.
- † This represents our foundational truth for today. We are to be dependent on God and submissive to God; we are to trust God for everything we need and obey God in everything he commands; we are to trust and obey, do what God says and trust God with everything else.
- So suppose you have no job or you are afraid you might lose your job. Worry and anxiety should not plague you: instead every day you should refocus yourself on having God's character and doing God's work, trusting that he will provide what you need.
 - Suppose you are unpopular at work or school because of your faith or morals. You should not change to make your life easier, instead you should persevere in faith, continuing to represent God by living out his character and obeying his commands, while trusting that your self-worth is not diminished by the hostility of others and that God will see you through this hard time.

- Suppose you have always struggled in life and you have children to support, and now you see a way you could make a lot of money, but it requires being involved in something a little shady. You should not pursue that bottom line method of taking care of your own needs, instead you should continue to live for God, trusting he will give you what you need.
- † I like using this graphic, because it makes the choice simple to understand and even obvious what to choose. So why is it that in life we often choose the bottom line instead of the top line?
- **[Slide 15: uncertainty]** One reason is uncertainty. God promises to take care of our needs, but not necessarily our desires. There probably was not much difference for Adam on this first day: God had given him a paradise garden in which to live, work he would find fulfilling, a perfect relationship with God himself, and no sinful corruption to constantly tempt and deceive him; what else could he want?
 - But for us? Oh boy, there is a big difference between what we need and what will satisfy us, right? We are not content with food, water, and shelter, we want a two car garage and three vehicles to drive; we are not content with a loving family, we want validation from outside the family; we are not content to know God and be his person, we want to have power, influence, popularity, wealth, and more. So we are tempted and deceived into seeing the bottom line as attractive, because God might not give us all we want.
 - And sometimes what we want is downright sinful, so then we know we cannot expect God to bless us with it. We might want an extra-marital affair or to hurt someone, and we know if we obey God he will not give us these things, so we choose to get them for ourselves, we choose the bottom line of sin.
 - Another problem is that we don't really trust God. Come on, admit it to yourself, we view God's promises as iffy, and we tend to find our security not in our identity as God's image and in his promises, but in our worldly accomplishments. We feel better about ourselves the more power, influence, popularity, and wealth we accumulate for ourselves. So the bottom line looks attractive, because we think we can get what will make us feel secure, but we are not so sure about the top line, about promises written in a book written so long ago.
 - We also like the feeling of being in control. Adam was not supposed to make any moral decisions for himself about what was right or wrong. He was supposed to do what God gave him to do. But we like to make decisions, so we pick and choose among God's commands and we change his priorities for us so we can live how we want. We call ourselves Christians, but it is a convenient Christianity. We rationalize that in certain situations the bottom line is right for us.
- † And, even if we are pretty sure God will deliver what we want, if we desire good things and God has promised those things, scripture shows us that sometimes God delays deliverance or changes the deliverance in ways we cannot anticipate.
- For example, God clearly told David that he was anointed as the King of Israel, God's highest representative on Earth at that time, but then David had to flee from Saul for years before actually taking the throne. So there was a delay even though David clearly knew the deliverance was coming. The Bible shows that David had tempting opportunities to take the bottom line and kill Saul instead of trusting and obeying God.
 - When God promised to deliver the Jews from slavery in Egypt, if they could believe this promise at all, they probably envisioned being set free so they could live in peace. Instead, God's plan was for continued struggle in Egypt while God brought many disasters on the Egyptians, then

the Egyptians piling gold and silver on them as they were leaving, then the Egyptian army pursuing to kill them while they took a strange and winding path, then a harrowing trip through a miraculously parted sea which wiped out the Egyptian army, only to find they still faced struggle and uncertainty in the desert! So God did deliver on his promise, but it was significantly different from what the Jews had anticipated and desired.

† **[Slide 16: certainty]** Given all that, why should we take the top line? If we can get what we want on the bottom, why should we even think about the top line? In fact, I would bet it is true that taking the top line all the time usually results in a harder life than taking the bottom line. So why do it?

- One reason is we were created and are procreated to be God's image: to reflect his character no matter what is going on; to represent him no matter the consequences; to multiply his image and to rule creation in his name not our own. If we take the bottom line, by relying on ourselves or by chasing things not in God's will, then we are sinning, and that means we are turning away from our identity and purpose in God. Sin will destroy us: it will take us deeper into temptation and deception, and away from God's freedom and truth.
- In fact, with a bottom line choice, we are turning away from God himself. We are choosing to live by the flesh instead of the Spirit, we are choosing to follow Satan instead of Christ, we are choosing our own happiness over God's. So a second reason to choose the top line is to stay in intimate relationship with God. Sin cannot take away our salvation, but it certainly can destroy our relationship with God.
- A third reason, related to these, is that the top line is the only way to God's promised spiritual blessings. If we want joy for life and an inner peace that transcend the ups and downs of life, walking with God, in his light, on the top line, is the only path.
- If we want a greater realization of the fruit of the Spirit, God's help enduring our trials, stronger faith, spiritual growth, preparation to handle life and do God's work, success inspiring others with our example, uninterrupted intimacy with God, treasure in heaven, greater enlightenment about God and his perspectives, and success resisting temptation, then the top line is for us.
- When we turn away from God and our identity, we are walking away from all that. And you know what happens next? Some time passes and then you come to me and complain that God is not blessing you, and all I can say is, "Who walked away?" It wasn't God.

† We have this choice in every situation, but it helps to make a conscious philosophical decision up front. If you choose right now to follow Christ, to pursue the top line in every situation, it makes life so much simpler. Having that affair, getting drunk, cheating on your taxes are all automatic "noes", you don't have to be tempted by them; daily Bible reading, sharing truth with lost people, serving in the church are all automatic "yeses," so no hesitation.

- Will we depend and submit, or rebel? will we trust and obey, or live in the flesh? will we walk with God or dance with the devil? will we dwell in God's light or live in the shadows as pretenders? will we take the narrow gate, the difficult path, the top line?
- Let's pray. . .