

## A Perfect World

Over the last two weeks, we've been looking at the first chapter of Genesis, which describes the grand sweep of God's creation. In chapter 1, we see the light exploding out of nothing, the cosmic vapors swirling and collecting, the division of the land and the waters. We see life burst forth in all its variety and beauty, plants and animals covering the land, birds and fish filling the skies and seas. We stand in awe as God made mankind in His own image, both male and female. And we marvel that God could simply speak a Word and cause all these things to come into being. We come away from Genesis chapter 1 with a sense of amazement and wonder at the power of our God.

Genesis chapter 2 has a very different feel, doesn't it? In fact, some skeptical scholars think it tells a completely different story, preserving another ancient creation myth that came from another completely human source. But nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, it is easy to see that if Genesis 1 is a panorama, Genesis 2 is a close-up, giving us the intimate details about how a small part of the big picture of creation fell into place.

For example, Genesis 1 tells us that God created the dry land and all the plants that grow on it. But Genesis 2 tells us about a particular part of that land, a garden that God planted in one spot. Now, we don't know how big that garden was. But we know it was a real place, because verses 10-14 describe its location in terms of rivers and countries that people would have known about in Moses' day. You could find Ethiopia and Assyria on a map, and the Hiddekel, also known as the Tigris, and the Euphrates rivers are still flowing today. That means the Garden of Eden was in the place we now call the Middle East, somewhere near the present land of Israel.

But those geographic details also remind us that if chapter 2 describes our world, it was very different from the way the world is today. For if two of the rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates are still on the map, the Pishon and Gihon rivers have disappeared – there is no river that runs from the headwaters of the Tigris and the Euphrates down into Ethiopia. The geography of the world has drastically changed since the days of Adam and Eve.

The world's weather is quite different as well. We have all learned about the water cycle – how the sun causes water to evaporate from the oceans, and how the winds carry that moisture up into the mountains where rain falls, filling the rivers which run down into the seas. We've seen that water cycle up close and personal in the last few months, haven't we?

But verse 5 tells us that in the days of Adam and Eve, this rain cycle hadn't started yet. Instead, mist somehow arose out of the ground to water the plants. Perhaps there was a higher constant level of humidity in the air, or maybe the water table was high enough that there were lots of springs everywhere. We can't be sure, but we know it was very different. In fact, we don't hear about rain in Genesis until the days of the Noah's flood. Perhaps it was that cataclysmic event changed the world's geography and meteorology in a truly fundamental way, giving us the world the way we know it today.

People and animals also seem to have interacted quite differently in today's passage. You notice in verse 20 that God brought all the animals to Adam, and Adam gave them names.

Naming something is a way of demonstrating control over it. And so instead of running away from Adam in fear, which is what modern wildlife would do, the animals seem to have responded to Adam's mastery over them. It isn't until after the flood in the days of Noah that this relationship between man and the animals seems to change.

But the biggest difference between that world and our world, and perhaps the one that explains all the other differences, is the fact that there was no sin, no contradiction of God's Will, and no separation from God. Instead, we see God interacting with people directly, intimately. For if Genesis 1 states the fact that God made man in His own image, Genesis 2 tells us how God did this, in a very personal way.

James Weldon Johnson captured something of the idea of this moment in his poem, "The Creation:"

Then God sat down--  
On the side of a hill where he could think;  
By a deep, wide river he sat down;  
With his head in his hands,  
God thought and thought,  
Till he thought: I'll make me a man!  
Up from the bed of the river  
God scooped the clay;  
And by the bank of the river  
He kneeled him down;  
And there the great God Almighty  
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,  
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,  
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;  
This great God,  
Like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Kneeled down in the dust  
Toiling over a lump of clay  
Till he shaped it in his own image;  
Then into it he blew the breath of life,  
And man became a living soul.

No, all the details aren't exactly correct. Johnson's not writing theology. But he does capture something of the desire in God's heart, something of the love and care God put into making Adam. Think about it: God had a personal, intimate relationship with Adam. Remember, God made Adam in His own image. And the way that God did this was to breathe His own breath, His own Spirit into part of the physical matter that He had created. It's not too much to say that Adam had some of God inside of him.

And look at how God blessed Adam! As soon as God finished molding the clay into a man, God began tilling up the ground for a garden. What breathtaking vistas God must have created as He selected and arranged the plants, making sure that every sort of fruit tree in the world could grow and flourish there. What a wonderful garden, in which tropical bananas and cashews could grow in easy walking distance from cold-loving apples and chestnuts! What love God had for Adam to put him in a place like this!

But God had another blessing for Adam, because God knew it was not good for Adam to be alone. Just as Adam was made to be a friend to God, so God made a help meet, a helper suited to Adam. God made Eve out of Adam's flesh and bone so that as husband and wife they would complement and complete each other. Just as God and Adam enjoyed a relationship of perfect harmony, so Adam and Eve had no secrets from each other. They were completely open and honest, with no need for shame.

And remember, there was no separation between Adam and God, either. God spoke to Adam, God visited with Adam just like you and I speak with our friends, or more precisely, with our children. God was present at Adam and Eve's wedding – God gave the very first bride away just like a father walks his daughter down the aisle to meet her groom. And God told this first couple to be fruitful and multiply and fill up the Earth with their children. God told them that they would have dominion over all the animals that God had created.

And then God gave Adam some work to do. God turned over his masterpiece of landscape architecture to Adam for him to tend and keep. What fascinating conversations they must have had, as Adam could discuss botanical questions, not just with a wise County Extension Agent or Agricultural College Professor, but with the Creator of all plants!

And after blessing Adam with a beautiful world and a beautiful wife and a rewarding job, God gave Adam, the man created in God's image, the man who shared God's Spirit, yet another blessing. God gave Adam an opportunity to demonstrate his love for God.

For love, of course, demands to be expressed. When you desire to be in relationship with someone, you look for things you can do for him or her, right? You try to find out what she likes. You go along with what he wants to do. You demonstrate your love by giving of your time or treasure or talents.

But what could Adam possibly give to God? Everything around Adam had been created by God and belonged to God. And even if Adam was to do the best job he possibly could of keeping the Garden, it would only be what God told him to do. And it would only result in a nicer place for Adam and Eve to live, so being a good gardener might just as easily be self-serving as it would be an expression of love.

No, for a gift truly to be a gift of love, it must be unforced and it must be selfless. It must spring completely from the desire to please the other. It must be an outward expression of the real gift of love, which is the giving of the self to the beloved.

That's why God said to Adam, "Don't eat from this tree." Adam could see no reason not to eat from the tree – Eve later noticed that it was attractive and had beautiful fruit on it. There would be no obvious profit to Adam in abstaining from the fruit. There could be no other

possible motive for Adam to abstain from eating from the tree except to demonstrate his desire to please God.

In other words, Adam and Eve had one thing that they could freely do, one thing that they could give to God in return for everything He had given them. They could show their love by obedience, by doing something that didn't make sense to them, just because God wanted them to.

Of course we know that they didn't keep God's command – we'll find out more about that in the next chapter. We know that they fell into sin. And we know that's the reason that Jesus came to this earth, to straighten out the mess that Adam's sin produced, to restore His World and His people to the way they had been created in the beginning.

But even though Jesus has come to us, it's obvious that this world's still not perfect. We still have wildfires and droughts and floods and tornados, and sometimes all at the same time. We can't even predict the weather, let alone control it. We are still alienated from most of the animals, the ones we haven't domesticated. All too often we are alienated from each other, as our pride and our self-will infects all our relationships. Even within marriages, that first of all human institutions that was designed to demonstrate the bodily and spiritual union of a man and a woman, there remains much tension, many misunderstandings.

And yet, just as God breathed the breath of life into Adam, Jesus has breathed the breath of new life, the breath of His Spirit into all who trust in Him. Jesus has begun the process of making all things new by making all of His people new, cleansing us from sin from the inside out, remolding and reshaping us more and more into His image as we walk with Him and seek His will every day. And Jesus gives us His Spirit so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.

And as we are filled with the Spirit of Christ, and as we follow Him by faith, we can experience some of the joys that God always intended for us to have. So let us enjoy the work God has given each one of us to do. Let us enjoy the weekly Sabbath rest, taking time to commune with the God Who made us. Let us enjoy one another, seeking greater openness, greater intimacy with one another, greater love for one another, especially within the God-ordained bonds of marriage. And let us express our love for God, seeking to do His will as revealed to us in His Word, whether God's commands make sense to us or not.

For no matter how much our sin may have marred it, God's world is still a beautiful gift to us, still an amazing display of His love for us. And all these things – work and rest, love and marriage, and loving, thankful obedience to God's law – all these things have always been part of God's plan for a perfect world.