



THE GLORY OF MAN

SERIES: HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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Genesis 2:4-17

Second Message

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My son was taught the evolutionary process as part of his sixth grade school studies this year. I remember a chart that I used to see in grade school depicting man, first as a simple primate (like a small monkey), then through various stages of evolution, involving different types of hominids, all the way to *Homo erectus* (man who stands up) and *Homo sapiens* (man who knows). According to the theory of evolution, man stuck his claws up out of the ooze and has been crawling ever since, making it on his own. From ooze to booze in only four and a half million years!

I'm not trying to ridicule evolutionists. Christians need to love scientists who hold the evolutionary viewpoint, just as we need to love everyone. But I want my son to understand that underlying the evolutionary point of view is a set of presuppositions about life. One is that man is self made. The fundamental belief of the world is that man has everything he needs to face life and its demands alone, without God. Reduced to its essence, worldliness is the notion that man can live apart from God. But Scripture says that man can be man only when he knows God and is rightly related to him. It takes God to be a man. This is the message of the opening chapters of the book of Genesis.

Before we look at our text this morning I want to make a point about the kind of literature we are studying in this series. Last week, someone asked me whether these opening chapters of Genesis are historical or mythical. I want to suggest that they are both. Let me explain. As I read the Bible, it appears that Scripture intends for us to take Adam and Eve as actual historical figures who lived in space and time. If that is not the case, how can we explain the genealogies of the Bible which often begin with Adam? Adam seems to be just as real as anyone else in the various genealogies. For instance, the Book of Chronicles begins with Adam. Luke in his gospel traces the lineage of Jesus all the way back to Adam. In fact, the details which Moses, the author of Genesis, gives in this story lead us to believe that he wants us to take the account as literal and factual. In the passage we will look at the writer goes to great lengths to give the location of the Garden of Eden. The New Testament takes this story historically. In Matthew 10, Jesus holds up Adam and Eve as the ideal for marriage. Theirs was a monogamous relationship, the kind that God intended in the first place. These and other facts lead us to the conclusion that the Bible takes Adam and Eve as literal, historical people.

But, having said that, the Adam and Eve account is more than a story that is rooted in space and time; it is a story that teaches us things about ourselves. Adam and Eve represent every man and woman. In this sense it is supra-historical, or mythical, in that it helps us understand ourselves. One point will suffice to validate this. Everyone who has read this account discerns this intuitively. When God told the woman that she would bring children into the world through painful labor, does anyone think that God was referring only to Eve? No. We intuitively know that Eve represents every woman. When God said to Adam, "Dust you are and to dust you will return," and, "you will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow," does anyone think that God was referring only to the historical Adam? No. These words relate the experience of every man. So on another level, Adam is every man and Eve is every woman. This story sets out their hopes, dreams, and aspirations—and ours too, even our failures. So everything in this story is representative of our experience. It is on that level that we want to read the account and interpret it.

In chapter 2 we come now to the second account of the creation of man. The chapter falls into obvious divisions. Verses 4-17, which we will look at this morning, describe the making of man; verses 18-25, which we will take next week, describe the making of woman. Chapter 2, verse 4:

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. [This line belongs at the end of chapter 1. It's the tag line for the first creation account. Then we begin the second account, with this second line.]

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:4-7, NIV)

From the grandeur of chapter 1, which related the majesty of creation, the tone becomes more intimate now in chapter 2 as we are invited to explore the garden. Chapter 1 talked about "the heavens and the earth," but in chapter 2 it is "the earth and the heavens." There is a new name for God in this account.

Chapter 1 used the general name for God, the generic *Elohim*. This was the name, the Sovereign Creator God, used not only by the Israelites, but also by all the pagan nations. But chapter 2 refers to God as the LORD God, *Yahweh Elohim*, or *Jehovah Elohim*. This is God's name, in contrast to his general title in chapter 1. Our focus of interest here is no longer the cosmic perspective of the One who made the stars, but the intimacy of fellowship with the One who calls man by his name.

The point of this name change by Moses is to indicate that the Lord who created man is the Lord who cares for man. Moses knew from his experience at the burning bush what the name of God stood for. This is the Lord who is everything that man needs in order to become what God calls him to be. We are hand-crafted by a Lord who cares. We began life in his hands. Most of the religions of the ancient world were based on man's efforts to get God to care about him. But the Bible begins with the clear statement that God already cares for us. He loves us. We have been hand-crafted by him for a special purpose. This is what David discovered, and that is why he wrote, in Psalm 23, the words we are so familiar with, "Yahweh is my shepherd."

So the Lord who created us is a Lord we can know. He is the covenant-keeping loving God of Israel.

Though the perspective of chapter 2 is different from chapter 1, notice that it has a similar structure. Moses repeats what he said in chapter 1. He begins by describing the conditions that predated creation. Chapter 2, verse 4:

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground— (2:4b-6)

Such were the conditions that existed prior to the creation of man. Moses is not saying that the creation of plant life occurred after the creation of man. He is not referring to plant life in general here, but to plants that are cultivated. The point here is that no cultivation was going on, because there was no rain in this part of the land at this point; there were only springs and rivers. There was no one there to cultivate the soil and no one to irrigate the crops.

The lesson of this is that God wants man to cooperate with him in what he is doing. God planted a garden in Eden and charged man to make the whole world into a garden. God was going to do it, but he would do it through man. This is the story that is told throughout Scripture. God planned it so that man can cooperate with his activity; we can be co-workers with him in his redemptive work. There is a humorous story told of a man who was working in his garden. A couple came by and noticed what a beautiful garden it was. The man said to his wife, "Look at what God has done." The gar-

dener interjected, "You should have seen it when God had it all by himself!" It is true that in some sense God has chosen to work out his plan through man.

The third thing we learn in these verses is something of man's unique creation: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Man became a person. Here in chapter 2, Moses uses verbs to communicate the same truth he communicated in chapter 1 through nouns. In chapter 1 Moses says that man is created in God's image, according to his likeness. He is not saying that God is precisely like man. He is saying that man is somewhat like God. The fact that we can see means that God can perceive and is aware, though he doesn't necessarily have eyes. The fact that we can hear means that God can hear us when we pray. He is aware of our needs and our cries. That is why the psalmist says, "He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see?" (Psa 94:9, NASB). God sees us and hears us, and man can communicate and work with him.

And the passage says that we are like God in that we were created to exercise dominion. God is sovereign over his environment. He is not subject to anything or anyone. Moses wants the man of his time to know that he too is not subject to his environment; he too can rule. That is man's destiny. So God uses the nouns, "image" and "likeness," to communicate what he wants to say.

But here in chapter 2 Moses communicates this through verbs. God "forms" man out of dirt. The word that is translated "dust" here actually refers to dirt clods. (Just yesterday I watched my son watering dirt in the yard to make mud to shape things.) The word that is translated "forms" is used to describe the activity of a potter. A potter makes something exquisite out of raw dirt. That is what God did: He hand-crafted man. Then he breathed into man, and man became a person. You may know the story of the little boy who came to his mother and said excitedly, "Mom, is it true that we are made from dust and that after we die we go back to the dust?" She said, "Yes it is." "Well," he said, "I looked under my bed this morning, and there is someone there, but I don't know if he is coming or going!"

In the OT, the word for man, Adam, is based on the Hebrew word for earth, *adamah*. The counterpart in English is "earthling," a term derived from the word earth. We would say, "I will call his name earthling, because he is made out of the earth." This is a reminder to us of the stuff from which we are made. We are merely dirt, clods, dust. No one is made out of super-dust; we are all made out of the same stuff. God took us from the dust of the ground and formed us into something significant. And our significance comes from him. He is the One who made us what we are. Our worth and dignity come from our relationship with him. This is a good reminder to us of our frailty. We should not be so shocked and despairing when we act out of our humanity and are not what we should be. We can be what we

were intended to be only when we live out of the life of God, when we depend on him. When we do not do this, we revert to dust. The Lord knows that, as David illustrates in Psalm 103:

**The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness...
For high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who
fear Him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him;
For he knows how we are formed,
[the psalmist uses the same word as the Genesis text]
He remembers that we are dust.**

(Psa 103:8, 11-13, NASB; v14, NIV)

God is never disappointed in us when we act in the flesh and fail, because he knows us, and he knows we are but dust. Our strength, our ability to be God's men and women—to be what God has called us to be—flows from our relationship with him and our dependence on him.

So we have the Genesis description of man.

Verses 8-14 describe man's environment. It is an ideal setting.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; [Notice that this is not the Garden of Eden. Eden is not the name of the garden. It is a garden "in Eden." The word Eden means "Plain." Somewhere in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley, just north of the Persian Gulf, there was a vast plain; and somewhere in that area, east of Palestine, God planted a garden.] and there he put the man he had formed. And 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.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 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 Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (2:8-14)

Moses describes this place as a garden. We think of gardens as open areas, but in the ancient world a garden was a closed place that was surrounded by walls. So this is a picture of a walled garden where there is security and safety. In chapter 3 we will learn that there was an enemy on the outside, but here, in the garden, man is secure.

The garden in Eden then is a place of harmony, happiness, and peace. There man was in harmony with God, with the animals (he treated them properly), with his companion (there were no wars or conflicts), and with creation (he was a steward). It was all harmony and peace. This is what we long for, isn't it? The memory of this is in everyone's heart. There is a place of harmony and bliss, and the reason for that is because God is there, walking in that land. When God is not present there is no harmony, no happiness.

God caused all kinds of trees to grow in the garden—trees for beauty and trees for food. In the middle of the garden stood the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This reference to a "tree of life" indicates that there is a form of life higher than the first form of created life. The rest of Scripture calls it eternal life. It is life in its fullest potency. It is both a quality of life and a quantity of life in which one never perishes. If Adam had continued to partake of this tree he would have lived forever. As this theme develops in the progress of revelation, what does this tree of life represent? What can we eat, what can we drink that will give us eternal life? Jesus said, "If you eat my flesh, and drink my blood, you will have eternal life." His blood was shed for us. His body made open the way into heaven. He is the tree of life.

And what about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? We need to say, first, that this was a good tree. Everything that God created is good, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree is symbolic of the knowledge that man needs to cope with life. In fact, when man ate of this tree, in one sense he became like God, knowing good and evil. This tree represents coming to moral maturity, becoming aware that there is a battle between good and evil in this universe—and that is good. But man took this knowledge independently from God, and he died. God had another plan, called revelation, to teach man how to live. Man was not intended to learn it on his own, relating everything to himself.

In this garden there was a vast, fourfold river system that watered the crops. And the garden contained gold and aromatic resin and precious stones. The composite picture is of a perfect environment. The garden had everything that man could possibly want.

Next, in verses 15-17, man is given a vocation:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 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 of it you will surely die." (2:15-17)

The first thing we are told about man's vocation is that he was to work—and work hard. God gave man a plot of ground, and the resources to irrigate it, and told him to work. So work is not the result of the fall. It was after the fall that work became burdensome and the

land did not yield as it should. Work in itself is not a part of the curse. God always intended for men to work. Sloth is a sin. Laziness is a sin. Those among us who are out of work know that not working makes us uneasy after a while. We begin to doubt our self-worth. We feel restless and unnatural when we are out of work, because it is God's intention that we work.

And secondly, man is told to "take care" of the garden. The word actually means "guard" it, watch over and protect it. We can understand that command on two levels. First, on the physical level, man is to take care of his environment and make the world a beautiful place to live in. But the command is also to be understood on another level: man is to protect his environment spiritually. There was a snake outside, trying to get into the garden. The man needed to be watchful, to guard his environment from the attacks of the snake.

This is still man's responsibility today. The snake makes its way into our homes oftentimes through our attitudes. I find he often enters my home through my negative spirit or my critical heart, destroying our family environment. Or the snake can enter through the behavior of a child or through our mate. We have a responsibility to guard our garden and protect it.

So man is to work, to watch out for his environment, and to walk with God.

Then thirdly, the man was told in verse 17: "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." There was only one prohibition. God is often portrayed as a kind of cosmic wet blanket, always ready to snuff out fun, because he cares only about rules and regulations. But that is not true. On the contrary, God's command to the man is: "Enjoy! Freely partake of every tree I have created. Eat until you are content. But stay away from this one tree, because if you eat of it, it will kill you." That is why God is against sin. It is because he is *for* people. What he prohibits he denies to us, because it will kill us. There is only one rule: man is to live subject to God.

When man ate from that tree, he began to do what God does, and that is, to relate everything to himself. Man began to think of himself as the center of the universe, becoming like God. But it was all a lie. Man is not the center of the universe. He cannot be. But that is the seductive lie that the serpent has whispered into the ears of man ever since: "This is your world. Everything relates to you. What you like is right. What you don't like is wrong. Don't let anyone make you do what you don't want to do. You are the center of things."

So man is placed in a beautiful garden, and the way he gets to remain there is to be childlike, under the Creator God. That is what Jesus said, isn't it? He wants us to be children, in a way. We cannot seize life on our terms. We can have life only as we submit to the One who is life. He commands us: "Eat of all the trees of the garden." He sets before us a banquet table of life—all the foods, all the wonders of life. That is what the Creator really wants. But, we must take it on his terms, not ours. We must not take certain things until he says we can have them. We must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If we seize it on our own terms we will surely die. But, if we "live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," we will surely live.

This is the test of man: Will we insist on being human on our terms, reaching our fullest potential, becoming mature without God, or will we be childlike and trusting? Jesus said, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). Our ability to rule comes from our relationship to God. We can rule only when we are being ruled. The extent to which we allow God to master our lives is the extent to which we can master our environment.

Have we stopped trying to be little gods, trying to run things in our homes or workplace the way we want them to function? Have we crowned Jesus Christ Lord of his empire, where he belongs, and invited him with gladness to sit upon the throne of our hearts and rule there? These are the questions we must ask ourselves this morning as we come to the end of this account of the creation of man.

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