



The Sermon

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Genesis 2:8-17

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TRANSCRIPT

God has been so, so good to this church, because we have – well, we have a good God. And really what we are going to be thinking about here in Genesis chapter 2 is just that: we have such a good God. He has done so much for us, He's given us so much; and we're going to see that in the text. Before I read, let me take a moment and just pray and ask God for help. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly, Father, we are so thankful to have all around us these demonstrations of Your just gracious goodness to us. We thank You, Lord, for the music that helped us to sing praise to You this morning. We thank You for all of the technology that is in this room in allowing the message to go forward. We thank You, Lord, for this building and just that very tangible blessing that it offers, and all the ministry that can take place here. We thank You, Lord, that You have brought people here, that You have been at work, that You have saved souls, that You have allowed people to grow in the faith. We thank You that Sunday School was able to take place.

We're reminded of Psalm 126: "Lord, when You brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men who dreamed." We thank You, Lord, that our mouths are filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. We thank You, Lord, that others, even as they look on in this world as they're full of confusion, that then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has been good

to them." And we thank You, Lord, that You have been good to us, and we thank You for these very tangible expressions of Your goodness.

But, Lord, we come and we ask once more, the One who has been so good to us, we ask that once more as we open Your Word, that You would speak to us, that You would challenge us where we need to be challenged, that You would rebuke us where we need to be rebuked, Lord, that You would encourage us as well. And we pray that as a result of being here and being under Your Word, Lord, that You would transform us and make us more like the Lord and Savior who we care about.

We do pray for any amongst us, Lord, who don't know You yet. We pray that graciously, Lord, You would take the scales from the eyes, that You would make the dead alive today, that Your Spirit would be active amongst us. And, Lord, we pray that at the end of this time together we would be able to say, "Thank You once more, for You have been good to us." Help us now we pray; for it's in Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. [End]

I'll ask you, please, to open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2. I want to remind you just of a little bit before we read of what Austin mentioned last week, that there is a section break that comes in Genesis 2:4, and it's marked by that important phrase: "These are the generations. These are the generations," a phrase that will come up time and time again through the book of Genesis. And long before there were ever these chapter divisions and first divisions, there were these repeated phrases that God had inspired and placed in the text that allowed people to know that we were moving to a different part of the story. And Genesis 2:4 marks that move. I move from talking about creation at large to a narrowing focus on humanity specifically.

But also in this transition in chapter 2, verse 4, we're able to really begin a new story that'll continue all the way through to the end of chapter 4. Chapter 1, through the 2, verse 3, was really talking about the God who took chaos and created a wonderful world. In Genesis 2:4 to the end of chapter 4 is really a story about how God made something amazing, God

made something good, and how it devolved into, well, chaos again. And we're going to see over the next number of weeks the entrance of sin in the world. We're going to see in Genesis chapter 4 just what a mess it made of this world.

But here in Genesis chapter 2, we see where it all began. We see just how good God's creation was. And we have explained for us why this world that we live in today can be, at times, absolutely beautiful and stunning, and also so messy and broken and dangerous. We get to understand why people themselves can, at times, be so kind and wonderful and good to us, and at the same time, even the same individuals can be broken and depraved and nasty in the way that they treat us as well; how individuals can do good, and yet at the same time, that same individual can cause so much hurt.

As we look over the next number of weeks at these small sections, I want you to remember that little story that's running something good, something wonderful that we'll see today, will break down; and it breaks down because of sin. This wonderful, perfect – and it is a world that God Himself could say was very good. That very good world will break down into chaos as the chapters unfold. Last week Austin stressed that here chapter 2 is very much intertwined with chapter 1, and yet its emphasis is slightly different. In chapter 1 you had that stress of the God who is in control, the God who makes. And now here in chapter 2, we're going to see the God who is extremely personal.

Let me read to you Genesis chapter 2 from verse 4. It says, Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush in the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and it was watering the whole face of the ground – then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every

tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of the Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Remember in chapter 1 we have described for us this amazing Elohim, this God, this one who is almighty, and by simply speaking brought this whole world into being, who created this pattern of time across seven days. And chapter 2 then picks up and begins to describe His creative activity, again this time focusing on the personal involvement of God and the creation of the man and the woman. Chapter 1 stresses that transcendent nature of God, this One who is almighty, who is all-powerful. And chapter 2 comes in and describes how personal He is, how personally and intimately He is involved in the creation of the man and of the woman. And chapter 1 and chapter 2 are deliberately set side by side so that we will see these two aspects of God that will drive the whole narrative of the Bible. He is one who is transcendent, one who is powerful, and yet He is also one who is caring, one who is involved with the man and the woman that He has made.

Austin mentioned last week that there in verse 4, you have the introduction for the first time in Scripture of the capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, the name Yahweh, that personal name of God, that special name by which God's connection to His people; His promises, His commitment in a

unique way to people is encapsulated. And there in chapter 2, verse 4, appears for the first time in all of Scripture; we have the God of chapter 1 who is Elohim, who is God Almighty, and we have the God of chapter 2 who also is Yahweh, who is personal, who is in His person one who desires to be known by humanity. And this morning, if you take notes, that's worth writing down. We have a God who is transcendent, and yet personal. We have a God who is transcendent, and yet personal. And it's an amazing stress that we're meant to see all the way through this section.

You'll notice in chapter 2, verse 4, where that name Yahweh appears for the first time. It's not by itself, really it's a double-barreled name. It's the Lord God, Yahweh Elohim. It's put together deliberately; and through this section that'll continue. You see it in verse 4, you see it in verse 5, you see that double-barreled name in verse 7, and verse 8, and verse 9, and verse 15, and verse 16. In fact, through chapter 2 and chapter 3, that double-barreled name will appear twenty times.

Now to give you a little bit of perspective, the first five books of the Bible will only appear one other time. So there is a stress here in chapter 2 and chapter 3 about the person of God. You need to understand that the God of creation, the God who designed man and woman, is the God who is transcendent, and yet extremely personal. The Yahweh Elohim, the Lord God is the one who Scripture reveals in this particular chapter. And we're meant to appreciate that dual focus of who He is: He is one who is in control. And we need to remember that.

In the ancient world they had lots and lots of different false gods, gods of their imagination. But those gods were one of two things. They were either cold, removed, and remote. They'd never engaged with people; people were simply slaves to do their bidding. Or, you had the other extreme. The gods were messy, carnal, nasty creatures, that were involved with people, but to exploit them sexually, and to play tricks on them. They were their play things. And both distorted false gods of the ancient world were broken. And the God revealed here, the Lord God, the Yahweh Elohim of chapter 2 and chapter 3, stands in contrast to all of those ancient systems; for He is one who is fully in control. He is one who speaks, and the world comes into

being; and yet He at the exact same time is the one who handcrafts the man and breathes life into his nostrils. He's one who is intimately involved in the process, and creates the man and the woman in His image.

If you're trusting in Christ today, we have a Lord God. We have Yahweh Elohim. You have one who you can approach in prayer, who is able to do to the uttermost all that He desires. We can pray to the one who is in all control; and yet when we come to pray to Him, we come and we pray and say, "Our Father which art in heaven." The one who sits on the highest of thrones is one who we approach and call our Father, because He is both transcendent and wonderfully personal. We're able to sing of Him, "Immortal, invisible God, only wise and light and accessible, hid from our eyes." And one song later we can also sing, "How deep the Father's love for us. How fast beyond all measure."

This is a God that only the one true God could reveal. This isn't a God that comes from the figment of human imagination; one who is in all control, and yet gloriously personal with His people. It's amazing, isn't it, that we have one who can do; and yet one who wants to hear the prayers, the conversations of His children. You have a God who can move and do wonderful things across this world, and yet you have a God who the Bible says cares for you. Is that not a profound thought that we have a transcendent God in control of everything, and yet who personally has brought us into His family, and wants to hear the petitions of His children, He calls us; a God who is transcendent, and yet gloriously personal.

Austin also reminded you last week in verse 7 about another point that we need to restress today, that humanity has been crafted with special dignity. Humanity has been crafted with special dignity. And, in part, we need to restress that this morning, because our world has abandoned that utterly. Our world is giving children especially this demeaning message that they are just another animal. That is a work of fiction, and a work of fiction that will foster nightmares. If you want to know the truth about humanity, of the dignity that we have, you need to go to Genesis chapter 2. Long before there was a fall, there was Genesis chapter 2, and there was this testimony

of a God and His design, giving dignity to men and women and boys and girls.

Look back one chapter, Genesis chapter 1. Look at verse 24, and listen to the type of language used to describe God's amazing creation of the animal kingdom. Chapter 1, verse 24: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds – livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.' And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."

Now I listen once more to the language in chapter 2. Listen the verses 7 and 8, and hear how intimate the language is here. Chapter 2, verse 7: "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed." Did you hear the difference? In chapter 2, this revelation about His creation of the man here, we read a story that is full of intimacy.

Now that that verb "formed," "He formed," it fosters in the mind the idea of the potter working with the clay. There's the idea of a handcraft at work going on here. There's something extra. It's not just speak and everything happens, this is something where careful attention is put into it, every detail is noted, everything is thoughtfully shaped with great care and great detail. This is a distinct involvement that is being stressed. And then you have that other unique description of God breathing life into the nostrils of man.

It's a really hard verse. I'm glad Austin was having to do it last week. It's a very hard first to unpack, because the language is so intimate. It's very hard to talk about it without feeling that you're overstepping or you're losing that sense of reverence, because we are talking about the transcendent God; and yet this is extremely personal; yeah, extremely involved. This is a warm and intimate picture that is being painted here in verses 7 and 8. This is

language of crafting, of personal involvement and it's meant to help you all realize – y'all realize – I can do it, too. Happy fourth. It's meant to help us realize that God made men and women and boys and girls special. They are not just another animal, they are completely unique.

Now at the risk of upsetting the elders, can I ask anybody under the age of 12 to stand up? If you're under the age of 12, just stand up where you are. Go on, do it. Very nervous, Trinity. I thought Americans were boisterous and all, until this. Okay, stand up. And what I want you to do is I want you to look at your fingers; count them, make sure they're still ten there; and I want you to think about the brain that is in your head, and the body that God has given you. It is unique, and it's amazing. That brain is smarter than the most technical computer in this world. Those eyes in your eye sockets can see objects millions of miles away – the stars. Those noses – when your fingers aren't in them – can smell over ten thousand different smells.

You're not allowed to do this in church normally, but stick out your tongue. Go on, do it. Go on, you're allowed to. This is the one time you get permission, you'll never get to do it in church again. Stick out your tongue that tongue can taste over ten thousand different tastes. How dare you stick out your tongue in church. The bones – you can't see them, but you can feel them under your skin – weight for weight are stronger than iron. You can sit down, I know you're starting to panic. You have a heart that beats blood around your body, the journey of which you could take right around this world. It's an amazing body that God has given to you.

But that's not the point of Genesis chapter 2. You have amazing bodies; but the amazing thing about you is you have been made to know God. You've been made different to the animals; you've been made to know and to interact with Him. God has given you an absolutely amazing body, that is true; and yet it's not like dogs or cats or dolphins or apes or whatever particular animal takes your fancy and you have pictures of in your bedroom. God has made you to be known by Him, and to know Him. And there is a dignity attached to that that sets you apart from every other creepy crawly animal, fish, whatever it happens to be, bird of the air.



You're not like them, you're altogether different. You're special, because God has made you to be so.

Sometimes I think as Christians who love the word of God and understand the significance of Genesis chapter 3 – and you will get there – I think sometimes we can actually react too strong, and we miss the fact that before you get to sin in Genesis chapter 3, we have a Genesis chapter 2, that is meant to declare to this world you have dignity, you have been made special, you have been made with this unique purpose made by God to be known by God. So many people in this world, they run around trying to work out who they are and what their identity is, and they often attach it to the things they do – their work, or their hobbies, or sometimes their appetites, their sexuality, or their interests. That's not who you are, that's not your personhood. I can never be who you are; for your worth is found not in the things you do or the things you're interested in or the things you even want to do, your worth is found in that design brief that God made you to know Him, and your worth and your dignity is attached to that glorious truth.

God made men and women to be known by and to know Him. We were made to bear His image. We were made to have connection to God. And when you focus on what you do or what you like or all those other things and you try and find your worth in those things, that will always crumble and fall apart, because your worth is found in the connection you were designed to have with God. That's the thing that satisfies.

Sexuality, true sexuality anyway, is a gift from God; but it is not who you are. Your ethnicity, your culture; those may be a very special part of what makes you unique, but it is not fundamentally who you are. Your talent, your skills – we saw some of those being utilized at the front this morning – those are wonderful ways to be able to help others to serve. But again, that's not fundamentally who you are. That's not where your dignity comes from.

Instead, your dignity comes from the fact you are made to know God. You're an image-bearer, you're made to reflect Him. And that reality is what

adds value. That truth is what allows you to actually respect and engage with others. You're made distinct from the other animals. You're made uniquely to be engaged with God.

What dignity God has handcrafted the man and the woman to have. We have a God who is transcendent, and yet so personal. We have been crafted with this special dignity. And then, thirdly, and this is the main point I want us to swallow from this section of Scripture: "We have a God who provides for us abundantly, a God who provides for us abundantly."

Ancient kings. their gardens where their pride and joy. My garden, if you were to come to Ireland, it's a wonderful green country; and yet for whatever reason, my garden is not green, it's every other color – yellow, brown, gray. In the ancient world the garden was the pride and joy of the ancient kings. You think of the hanging gardens of Babylon – walled, secured, and amazing to behold. They were paradise.

That's where the word "paradise" comes from. It is a Greek word to describe these ancient, magnificent Persian gardens. They were paradise, places of particular splendor and places of intimacy, where the king would invite only his most special guests to come and to spend time in this beautiful paradise with him, with the king. They were wonderful things. And yet here in Genesis chapter 2, we have the original garden, and it is unsurpassed by anything that comes after.

Forget Babylon's hanging gardens. Here we have in Genesis chapter 2, the Creator's garden, His hanging gardens. And what these verses are trying to do is help us grasp something of how unsurpassed these gardens were in beauty, and how full they are of provision. God is making provision for mankind, and in a special way He crafted them in this intimate way, and then He provides for them with abundance.

Notice, first of all, how He provides space for humanity. Look at verse 8, look at the language that's used there: "The Lord God planted a garden in

Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed." That fruitful garden was made for humanity. "Eden," the garden of Eden, that word means "delight." This garden of Eden was a garden of delights, a supreme garden full of these glorious delights to be enjoyed.

You think of those ancient gardens in the ancient world, they were made for the king himself, they were for his personal use. But Scripture records here in Genesis chapter 2, the King of kings Himself, He makes the best of gardens; but not for Himself, but for the man and the woman that He has handcrafted. And we're told in verse 8, "He put them," He put them in this special place. That word "put" has the idea of rest embedded into it. This was a place for them to be. This was their home. This was a place to put up their feet, to be at rest; it was made for them. This was a place where they would work; we know that, we'll see that in verse 15. But it was a place where they were meant to be, and a space for them to roam in, a true home made for them by God Himself. He provides for them space.

Secondly, He provides aesthetics and food. He provides for them aesthetically, and He gives them glorious food to eat. Now not all of us are Chip and Joanna Gaines, and so maybe you don't grasp the weight of this particular point. Different people have different personalities. In our house Sarah has that unique gift of being able to walk into a room and to observe the colors that are on the wall, and to notice the candles that are laid out, and she can soak it all up and she can remember it; whereas I couldn't tell you if the windows were open or closed. I'm absent-minded in those things. Some people are so good at seeing. They enjoy the beauty of everything around them, they soak it up. Now where Sarah and I do agree is we love to eat. Those ten thousand different tastes that you can taste with your tongue, we want to taste all of them. There's nothing as satisfying as putting that morsel into your mouth that just melts away and fills you with happiness and joy.

Look, look at the way this garden is described in verse 9: "And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." God made everything grow already; but in this special garden for the man and the woman, He made specifically to grow for

them pretty things to look at, and yummy things to eat. That's not something to take for granted. That's just another demonstration of how kind God is. He doesn't just give you your daily bread; rather, He gives you the ham and the cheese and the tapenade and whatever else it is. He gives glorious things to be enjoyed. He provides for humanity's eyes, He provides for their tongues, this garden full of treats: the garden of delights.

Thirdly, He gives the tree of life right in the center. Again, the rest of verse 9: "The tree of life was in the midst of the garden." We are told in chapter 3, verse 22, that that tree was designed to provide for people eternal life. In other words, right in the center of the garden and right in the center of the home that God built for this man and this woman, He provided the means to eternally sustain them.

Are you getting the picture of what's being described here? All that they need is right here. They have a place to call home. They have things to enjoy. They have a means by which their life is going to be sustained. This is a catalogue of blessing upon blessing upon blessing that God gives to His image-bearers.

And then, fourthly, we see He provides sustaining rivers. Now unless you really like water sports, this maybe doesn't resonate with you. But again, remember the people who first heard Genesis read to them, there are people who'd been wandering in the desert for forty years. The one thing they longed to see was a river. They wanted water. And imagine how they would have heard the vocabulary of verse 10: "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there would divide it and became four rivers."

The text speaks of these four massive rivers. Not one, not two, not three, but four. This is the most irrigated garden you can imagine. And you have those references just sprinkled in, just a little bit extra icing on the cake, of buckets of gold, and precious stones – the onyx stones. We have this wonderful means by which the garden can be irrigated, kept, maintained; and there's all these precious materials all around. As those original hearers sitting on the plains of Moab listening to Moses reciting Genesis to them, as

they heard this particular description, their eyes opened wide: a land with water and abundance, where things could be grown, where things could be sustained; a land with all of these precious stones. This was a place of flourishing. This is a garden beyond their wildest dreams. And yet there's more.

Look at verse 15, because we see how God also provides work. Verse 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." You see that phrase "to work it and keep it," those are words that appear numerous times throughout the Old Testament, and most often used to describe spiritual service. That word "work," it simply means to serve. It's most often used to describe our worship or our service that we render unto God; while that other word "keep," it's most often used to describe how we are to keep His commandments.

So, again, you think of this as a response. These people are meant to respond to the direction of God. They're enabled to do what He asks them to do. I think the idea here is that, yes, they are working in the garden of Eden; and that work is, no doubt, physical. But we're to understand that work that they were doing as a service rendered unto God. It was a way of doing something for Him. It was really an act of worship. God had given them a special place, without doubt, but He also gave them in that special place a special work to do. It was a way they could respond to God, the God who they know; they could respond to Him with thankful service. It's not speaking here of a chore, it's speaking here of a glorious privilege to be able to serve, to be able to express our thanks to Him.

Growing up, one of the hardest things in the Curry household was buying my father birthday presents. He doesn't have any hobbies, and he would never tell you what he wanted; and the tension sat with us all because we loved him. And he worked so hard for us, and he provided for us. And naturally you want to express your thanks, but it's hard to do that when you're not told what they want.

But God graciously tells us what He wants, and He gives Adam and Eve here a means by which they can express their thanks to God. He gives them this way of demonstrating their thankfulness. So good is God to them. He provides a space for humanity. He provides aesthetics, and He provides food, and He provides a tree of life in their midst. He provides these sustaining rivers. He provides work. And, lastly today, notice that He also provides His law. He provides His law.

Look at verses 16 and 17: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" There is something here they are commanded not to eat. God says, "Don't eat from that fruit. Don't eat of the fruit that comes from the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

I think the idea here in that name is rather than being able to trust and obey the directions that God gives us, that to eat this fruit would open up a mindset of self-governance, a mindset that's determined to make its own moral decisions rather than simply obey God; and that is a dangerous thing. We love the idea of our freedoms, but that self-governance, when it bubbles out of a sinful heart, is misgovernance. We're made to follow the law, the word of the King of kings and the Lord of lords; and when one is allowed to embrace a sense of self-governance, misgovernance, it leads to death and it leads to destruction – and chapter 3 and chapter 4 are going to unfold that.

But that name of the tree, I think it also helps us to understand something about just how complex and contradictory men and women are. They have the knowledge of both good and evil, and so the idea in part is that from the moment of consumption, that humanity will have in them both that's designed to do good, and this compulsion to do evil and to reject God, and to be keen of their own existence. You see the wild confliction of thoughts here. The heart of man is a broken thing that contradicts itself. That's why you find post-fall that people have both the potential of doing good, and yet always an aspect of self-serving governance to them. It's why people can be kind sinners at the same time. They can be loving and good and wonderful to their immediate family, and yet go out and do something nasty to

somebody else. It's why even the best natural individual is still controlled by a self-governing mentality that rejects God. There's contradictions in people.

Come back to Genesis chapter 2 and how we're reading that. We'll talk more about that in Genesis chapter 3. Remember the providing God here. And notice in the instruction He gives and the law He gives, that He's providing something: He's providing a law for humanity. And it's particularly important as we think about Genesis 2 to recognize that God is graciously before anything happens, He's graciously providing His law, a warning, a protection; because though this garden was indeed paradise, in it was a growling dragon, a hungry dragon wanting to devour. And so in order to protect the man and to protect the woman, God puts His gardener on alert. That's a kind provision.

So often we look at God's protecting law and we view it instead as something oppressive, something to handcuff us, rather than to see it as a glorious warning given by God to protect us. And the Bible insists that the law of God is a good thing. Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man that delights in the law of the Lord." Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The law that is given here is good, it's a good thing. God's law is always good, it's a protecting provision.

I'm just about old enough to remember whenever seatbelt rules were brought in in Ireland. Maybe it happened sooner, maybe it happened later over here, I don't know. But when it happened in Ireland and they brought in the seatbelt rules, people reacted in very different ways. Some thought it was a terrible overreach of government to demand that we would buckle ourselves in; how dare they. While others saw it as a very good protection of government to preserve life. Now what determined whether you thought it was good or bad was really how you viewed government itself: "Is government a thing that overreaches, or is government a thing that seeks to protect?" And how you felt about the rule said something actually about how you felt about government.

Well, it's true about the law of God. How you feel the law of God says something about how you view God Himself. Do you love His law? Well, that says something about how you think about Him. Do you hate His law? Do you feel restricted by His law? Well that says something about how you feel God. What's your attitude to the law of God? Do you see it as a heavy-handed thing: "This Book is full of rules to oppress you"? Or do you see it as a good thing, a provision that God has given to keep you, to look after you, to guard you?

The law of God is one of the most wonderful provisions our good God makes. And here even in Genesis chapter 2 before sin entered the world, God gave law to protect His people. Do you see described here in Genesis 2 the providing nature of God? He provides space. He provides aesthetics. He provides food. He provides the tree of life. He provides those life-sustaining rivers. He provides work. He provides His law. And we'll see next week He provides something else. God is so good, and He gives so much. He provides everything that is needed here. God is almighty, and yet God is personal, and God is providing abundantly for humanity; and He still does that today. That continues to be the character of God, the one who post-fall continues to give.

Turn in your Bibles, as we come to a close, to Matthew chapter 6, a wonderful passage that often is read by Christians. The Bible tells us, "Every good and perfect gift comes from above," in Matthew chapter 6. Let me read just verse 25. It says, Matthew 6:25, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather in the barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"



Our God is still a providing God, and so we take so many of those blessings for granted. But they come from His hand. They come from His hand, because ultimately, that is the heart of God. He is one who provides abundantly for His people. Look around again at this building and the instruments, the technology, at the people. Trinity, God has given to you, because we have a God who provides abundantly. And it would be criminal not to recognize that His greatest provision was one that He gave for us in the form of His Son, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but receive eternal life."

And not only does He give eternal life, but you think of that story in Luke chapter 15 of the lost son – the sinful, lost son. He returns, and the father sees him far away, and he runs down the road, and he throws his arms around him, and immediately asks for a ring to be put on his finger and sandals to be put on his feet, a cloak to be wrapped around him, the fattened calf to be slaughtered, "because that which was lost has been found." We continue to have a God who gives lavishly, who doesn't just see it, but gives lavishly to His children, not because they deserve it, but because we have a God who has a providing, caring nature. That's where our confidence sits.

You think of what He's promised for you, Christian, after you die. All that will be involved in that is beyond our comprehension. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew; but before Jesus ever came into the world, it was all translated into Greek. And the Greek version of the Old Testament, Genesis 2:8, it translates the word "Eden," the garden of Eden, as paradise, paradise. And the word is used once in the New Testament in Luke 23:43, when Jesus hanging on the cross, He speaks to the thief beside Him, and He uses that word, that word "paradise," that word "Eden," and He says to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in" – there it is – "paradise." And Jesus is giving to this thief on the cross really a statement of return.

The thief: "Nobody else in society likes you, they're all standing around the cross taunting you." And yet Jesus says, "I'm going to bring you back to that place of dignity." Here's a thief who tried to steal; and yet and that moment has nothing, just like Jesus. The soldiers have divided anything He

had amongst them. He's nothing; and yet Jesus says, "I'm going to bring you back to paradise, to that place of abundant provision." He's a dying thief on the cross, and Jesus says, "I'm going to bring you to paradise, the place where the tree of life sits, where eternal life is gained."

The good news of the gospel is that we, if we are trusting in Christ, get to return to paradise, to this place crafted by God. But what makes paradise paradise? It's not just that it's beautiful and wonderful and all of that; but there in that place we will be with the transcendent, almighty, personal God, and we will be with Him personally. That word "paradise," we've said several times, it's a word that was used to describe those gardens of Babylon. And the king of Babylon, he would invite his most special, elite guests to come to the garden to be with him. And then, of course, they went in and they were astounded at everything they saw, and how beautiful it was. But what was understood to be the real privilege in going to those gardens was you went to the garden to be with the king, that it was time for you to have exclusive access to the one in control, the king of the nation.

What made the experience wonderful, what made the experience beautiful, what made the experience lovely – mark – was not so much how amazing everything around was. It was. But it was the one that you got to be with in the moment. And as the thief hangs on the cross beside Jesus, what is astounding is not that Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." What is amazing about that statement is Jesus says, "Thief on the cross, today you will be with Me, Me, in paradise." And for all who truly know and love the Lord Jesus, that continues to be our drive and our hope, that we have been so saved by God, not because we deserve it, just because He is gloriously, wonderfully gracious, that Jesus has done that finished work, that those who are trusting in Him, they will go to paradise, but they will go to be with the One they love, because He first loved them.

And so it begs the question ultimately today, "Do you know Him? Do you know Him?" He's abundantly given to you already today the home, the food on the table this morning, the coffee that you needed to get going, the family around you. He's abundantly given to you. And yet the Bible says,

"He has given, Jesus Christ has given His life as a ransom for all who will trust in Him."

This morning, if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, if you're not excited at the idea of being with Him, I want to encourage you: please come and talk after the service. I would love the opportunity to pray with you, and ask that God would open your blind eyes to see that the glory of the gospel is not simply a lovely place with nice things to look at, and lovely things to eat, and amazing facilities and everything else. But the wonder of the gospel is Jesus Christ Himself. And I would love to pray that God would help you, that He would help you to see the ultimate beauty that is Jesus Christ. Let's pray now and thank God for all He has given to us.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, You have been so good. You've given to us so graciously. We recognize, Lord, we can't begin to count all of the blessings that You give to us; and yet we thank You that You, the God who is over all is the God who cares for us personally. We pray and we ask for each of us that You would meet us now at the point of our need; and we can pray that because we know that You care for us. And we pray, Lord, for each and every individual in this room who knows and loves You. We pray that You would excite our hearts once more at the idea of getting to be ultimately with our Savior. We pray and ask, Lord, that You would help us to recognize Your goodness to us each and every day, and to return thanks to You for it.

And, Lord, we do pray for those who are in this room who don't know You as Lord and Savior. We ask that You would help them to see that their identity, their dignity is not to be found in what they know or what they do or anything else, but it's to be found in knowing You. And we pray and ask that You would help them to see that they can know You as Lord and Savior, through that finished work of Jesus Christ. And we pray, Lord, for them, that graciously today would be the day that You give sight, that You would make the dead man alive, that You would draw him to Yourself, and that You would cause him to be able to exercise repentance and faith, that that he would know the glory of sins forgiven and the sweetness of

fellowship with You Yourself, through the finished work of Jesus Christ; in whose name we pray. Amen.