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It All Started in a Garden

Genesis 2 and 3

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Like many of you over the years, I've watched the footage of the assassination of President Kennedy dozens of times. But every time I see it, I get this knot in my stomach because you know where the story's going. It's almost impossible to enter into the celebration because you know in a moment it will go from celebration to unimaginable tragedy. It's the very same feeling I get every year at Palm Sunday. It's really hard to enter into the celebration because you know where the story's going. Five days later, in the same town, with the same people, Jesus would be rejected. He would be tortured and He would be executed. I find it hard to celebrate, knowing that's coming.

I find it a very sobering thing whenever I remember that there actually was a time in history where the God of the universe became a man—and literally walked on this earth—and it was wonderful! He made the lame to walk; He made the blind to see; He raised the dead to life; He touched the untouchables and He loved the unlovables. He was perfect in His kindness and His love, in His grace and His mercy. And they rejected Him—and they hated Him—and they tortured Him—and they executed Him! How can that be...how could that *possibly* be? What is it that happened two thousand years ago and why does it keep happening today? To understand that we really have to go back and understand what happened at the very beginning of the story. There are lots of ways to frame the message of the Bible. But one of the ways you could frame it is that it started in a garden, moved to a garden, moved to another garden, and ends in a garden. This morning we want to look at where the story began—in a garden God Himself described as paradise.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to Genesis, Chapter 2. Genesis chapter 1 is a picture of Elohim, the creator God, the God of the universe who literally spoke the universe into place. You come out of chapter 1 believing this is a God so big, so powerful, He feels unknowable. But the picture changes in chapter 2. Chapter 2 is not chronologically moving on with the story; it's actually backing up and moving into Day 6 and learning how the details unfolded. We pick it up in Chapter 2, Verse 7.

> **Then the LORD God formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.** (*NASB, Genesis 2:7)

Now there are several things to notice there. The idea of God forming Adam **from the dust of the ground** is a Hebrew word used to describe a potter and a piece of clay. It's a very personable, intimate medium. He goes from speaking the universe into place to rolling up His sleeves and getting His hands in the mud and forming Adam in a very personal, intimate way—as a picture of the reality that *people made in My image* would be different. This would be a different relationship. You also had that God **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**. It's a bit of a CPR imagery that is very intimate—almost uncomfortably intimate. The other thing you have is the use of the name of God. This is very useful for understanding the theology of chapters1, 2 and 3.

Chapter 1 is Elohim, capital "G", small "od" in English. It's the Creator God; it's the big God. But when you get to chapter 2 the name becomes the LORD, all caps, God. It's Yahweh, Elohim. LORD God is the God who is intimate, the God who is personable, the God who enters into a covenant relationship with His people. The name helps us understand the theology.

Verse 8

> **The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.** (Vs. 8-9)

God created a place that He himself defined as *paradise*. That's what the Hebrew word translated **Eden** means. Somehow within that paradise there was a garden, and it was in this garden paradise where God would place the man whom He had formed. Again the emphasis is on the forming. This is someone special to God, so He created him special. In my opinion this is the first glimpse of grace in the Bible. Grace doesn't come just *after* the fall. God doesn't *become* gracious; He's always *been* gracious. God created what He said was paradise and then He took Adam and He simply placed Him in the garden. Adam didn't earn that; Adam didn't deserve that; Adam was simply given paradise as a gift of God's grace. That's very helpful to formulate a right view of God. This is who God is. He is gracious; He is generous; this is what He wants for us.

Now no one can really comprehend the wonder of Eden. Maybe think about what place, of all the places that you've been to in your life, is the place that you would say was the most spectacular? A breathtaking place, and imagine that as just the slightest resemblance of what Eden must have been. Interesting the emphasis on the trees—he says the trees of the ground were both **pleasing to the sight and good for food**. They were magnificent to look at and they were wonderfully delicious to eat the fruit of. We pick up the story then in Verse 15:

> **Then the LORD Good took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.**

It is always helpful to remind ourselves that work is not a result of the fall. You could not define paradise as a place where you do nothing. Paradise is a place where there is meaning and there is purpose. Before sin ever entered into the picture, Adam had a responsibility. He was the manager; he was the gardener—the caretaker of paradise. Life had meaning and purpose in the garden.

> **And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."** (Vs. 16-17)

Now it's interesting, when we read that, how quickly we go to the negative and we sometimes fail to see the positive. Go back and look at what God said. "**From *any* tree of the garden you may *freely* eat."** These were trees that were magnificent to look at and wonderfully delicious to consume the fruit of. And God said, "The garden is full of them. The buffet is always open. Eat from any tree in the garden and you can eat as much as you want all the time. There's just one deal: There's one tree in the middle of the garden and don't eat from it. *If you eat from it, you will die*." Virtually the arrangement was this: There was a garden full of, "Yes" and it's the most magnificent yes you can ever imagine. And there's one, "No". It's a reminder that, at the end of the day, God's heart is to be generous, not restrictive. Many, many people, including many Christians, still struggle with the view of God that God is more restrictive than He is generous. We fixate on the "No" and we lose sight of the "Yes". I guarantee you, in Christianity there are way more yes's than there are no's—but we forget that. The rest of Chapter 2 is the story of God's creation of Eve, in order to be a partner for Adam—a partner for whom he could share his life, with whom he could be intimate, with whom he could share pleasure. And the chapter ends with this wonderful description:

They were naked and they were unashamed. (Vs. 25) Paradise!

It's good to remind ourselves that God is the author of relationships. God is the author of intimacy; God is the author of pleasure; God is the author of sex. It was all His idea and it was all part of paradise. And it was beautiful—**naked and unashamed**. It's really important that, as you formulate your view of God, you understand that because, what God wanted for you is absolutely magnificent! It would be wonderful at this point to close the service and go home. It would be like celebrating Palm Sunday, pretending that Friday didn't happen. Let's just celebrate chapter 2 and pretend chapter 3 never happened. But Chapter 3 did happen—and every single one of us lives with the mess that has come as a result. Chapter 3:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made...(3:1a)

I would suggest to you that the serpent is not creative—but he's very crafty. What I mean by that is: here we are thousands of years later—he still employs the exact same strategy. He found a doozy right from the beginning and hasn't changed for thousands of years—very crafty! What transpires in Chapter 3 is what transpires in our world every single day.

And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said..." (Vs. 3b)

The question arises, "How do you tempt someone who literally has it all?" There wasn't a single unmet need that Adam and Eve had. They were in paradise—everything was wonderful! They virtually had it all. So how do you tempt somebody that has it all? Answer: you convince them that there still could be more. As good as it is, there's probably more out there. How do you do that? You start by beginning to break down a person's belief that God is good. God is not as good as you think He is. He is way more restrictive than generous. And that's how the thought process starts. The Hebrew word that is translated **indeed**—it's a very difficult Hebrew word to translate into English. As a matter of fact it's really an impossible word to translate into any other language. It's a very unique word. The best way to understand it is that it reflected this idea that God is not as good as you think He is. It's beginning to put a question mark in Eve's mind related to the goodness of God. So he's saying, "Hey, God is not really who you think He is." That will be followed by three very strategic lies that frame the discussion.

"Indeed, has God said. 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Vs. 3c)

Now that is a ridiculous quote of God's statement! It isn't even close; it isn't even in the ballpark. God said, **"From any tree of the garden you may freely eat,"** and the serpent has the audacity to say, "Hey, what's with this God? He said you can't eat from any of the trees. We're not going to fall for that one." The woman immediately responds—but here's how the strategy works: The enemy—the serpent—knows this is a ridiculous statement. It doesn't represent God's statement at all. It's going to go way over here, compared to what God said. So the woman is going to come to God's defense, but what happens is the serpent takes her so far over, that her statement is going to bring it back, but she doesn't make it all the way back—which is exactly what the strategy was.

First lie is: "God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden." The woman's not going to buy that, so the woman said to the serpent, "**From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not**

eat from it or touch it, lest you die.' " At first glance we would say, "Hey, good answer; you really put him in his place."

In a Hebrew narrative, whenever there is a repetition of something that was said previously, it's very important to notice if there were words added or if there were words left out. That would never be stylistic and it would never be by accident. It's always strategic. When we analyze what the woman said, we realize two very important things. Number one: God said, "**You may eat freely**." She missed that part. God also said, "**You can't eat from it**," but Eve said, "*You can't eat from it or touch it*." I didn't hear God say that. I would suggest to you that Eve is the first legalist. (laughter) She's already adding stuff. The point is that the serpent took her way over here. Eve's correcting that, but she doesn't make it all the way back. She is seeing God as more restrictive and less generous than He really is. It's starting to change her view of God, which sets her up for lies number 2 and 3.

The other thing to notice is that we are no longer talking about *LORD God*. We're back to *God* because, as God seems more restrictive and less generous, God seems less personable; God seems more far away—and so the names for God begin to reflect that in the text.

> **The serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (Vs. 4-5)

Two lies there—the second one is built on the third one. The second one is, "*You will not die*; I mean, come on, God's a bully. God's just trying to manipulate you. God's trying to control you. What is going to happen is: when you choose to eat from the tree *you will know good and evil.* And God knows that. He's trying to keep you from doing that because, in that moment, you will become like God." In other words, lie number three was, "You can be your own God and God knows that and He doesn't want to let that happen." When it says...**knowing good and evil...** it doesn't say *knowing good and evil experientially*. God doesn't know evil that way. It means knowing it in terms of defining it. "You can decide what is right and wrong; you can decide which tree is off limits; you make the rules in the garden. I guarantee you, if you do that, you'll have more because God is restrictive more than He is generous." It's what we would refer to today, thousands of years later, as relativism. It is the belief that, "I can decide for myself what is right and wrong. Who put God in charge? Who said God could decide what tree is off limits? I'll decide what tree is off limits. I'll decide what's right and wrong; I'll decide what's good and evil; and there are no consequences to that. I'm free to choose however I please what is right and wrong and good and bad." That's the lie that the serpent convinced Adam and Eve was true. Verse 6:

> **When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes...**

Now wait a minute, I've heard that somewhere before. That is the description in chapter two of *every single tree in the garden*. There's a reality to the fact that the serpent could offer Eve nothing more than what God had already *freely* offered. She saw that *it was wonderful to look at and that the food would be good,* and God said, "Hey, that's true of every tree in the garden." See, that's the reality of temptation. At the end of the day, the enemy can offer you nothing that compares to what God has offered you—but it comes at the risk of losing everything! What a terrible deal—you can gain nothing and you can lose everything. But by this time Eve is in this frame of mind. The issue wasn't really the fruit. The issue is the second half of the verse.

...and that the tree was desirable to make *one wise*, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (Vs. 6b)

The core issue wasn't so much the fruit; it was the same as every other tree. The issue was: "I can be God. I can be in control. I'll decide what's right and wrong. If I'm my own God, life will be better because God's not so generous and God's really restrictive and I don't really appreciate that known in the garden." So they ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked;(Vs.7a)

Busted! They knew at that moment they had been had. Life wasn't better; it was worse. Suddenly there was this shame of the sin and everything's starting to fall apart because they had believed a lie. Verse 8:

They heard the sound of the LORD God...

Don't miss that! It's the first time in the temptation scene where *LORD God* is used. God seemed far away because she began to question the goodness of God, because she began to question the generosity of God, and began to think God is restrictive. But the reality all the way through is God is LORD God—the loving, intimate, caring God whom they had known. *That* God comes to the garden to look for them.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden... (Vs. 8b)

I am intrigued by the words: **They *heard* the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden**. I don't know exactly what that means, but it doesn't mean a disembodied spirit. Somehow God was walking in the garden in such a way that He made noise.

...walking in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Vs. 8c)

The story becomes so very sad. The idea was that God used to come to the garden in the cool of the day just to delight in spending time with Adam and Eve—and they would stroll through the garden, just delighting in one another. So God shows up to the garden, and they are nowhere to be found because they are hiding. This is what sin does to us. It makes us hide. It makes us wear masks. It makes us pretend. And it's interesting that they are hiding *in the trees*. The very objects that God had given them to experience joy, to experience pleasure, to experience delight, now become the objects for hiding.

I think about how true that is today. Think about the things in our world that God gives out of His generosity that we might delight in, that we might find joy in. But because of our sin and our shame and our corruption, we start using them to hide behind. As we distance ourselves from God and we hide behind these things because now we are afraid of God and we don't know what's going to happen. Verse 9:

Then the Lord God called (He cried) **to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"**

This is the cry of a broken heart. This is the cry of a lover who went to meet the one whom He

loves—and she was gone. And He cries from the bottom of His heart and He says, "Where are you? Where are you?"

> **Adam said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid...** (Vs. 10a)

This is such a sad story. It goes from the beautiful intimacy, the love that they shared, strolling through the garden, to Adam being afraid of God. He's now hiding from God because God is going to whack him—and everything's falling apart. What a terrible turn in the story.

> **..."I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."** (Vs. 10b-12)

God said, "*How did you know you were naked? What did you do*?" And Adam said, "Hey, it wasn't my fault. It's that woman! As a matter of fact, the woman that *You* gave me; she messed up." And God said, "Hey, woman, what's the deal?" And she said, "Hey, it's not my fault. It's that serpent guy; He deceived me." Doesn't sound familiar at all, does it? Blame...excuses... pointing fingers—somehow, at the end of the day, it's not my fault!

Starting in Verse 14, God lays out the curse on the serpent. In Verse 15 God says, "*Here's what's going to happen. There's going to come a seed of a woman,"* which means a human being. "*And the seed of the woman is someone who you are going to bruise on the heel*." That would be the cross. "*But in the process He's going to crush your head*." This is God's promise that, at the end of the day, you may have won this round but, when it's all over, I win! I will do whatever's necessary to bring life out of death. It's God's promise.

In Verse 20 Adam names the woman Eve. Eve means *mother of the living*." And you say, "Why did he name her that? Everything in this chapter is about dying." It's because Adam understood exactly what God promised in Verse 15 and his statement of faith is, even in the midst of this dying, I'm going to name her *mother of the living* because God will do whatever is necessary to bring life out of death.

Verse 21 is the reminder of blood shed to cover the shame of sin. Just the slightest hint that whatever God is going to do, Verse 15, will include the shedding of blood to somehow cover the shame of sin. Who would have imagined that it would actually be God Himself who would be the seed of the woman, who would shed His own blood in order to crush the head of the serpent, in order to crush sin and death once and for all—in order to offer life so we could make it back to paradise.

So what happened two thousand years ago when God became flesh—the seed of a woman—and entered into this world? He entered into this world neck deep in religion. Religion is a reflection of this desire to be our own god. "I'm going to make my own way to God. I'm going to make the rules; I'm going to make the rituals; I'm going to make the regulations." Religion thrives on a view of God where God is frightening; God is distant. "I need to be afraid of God; I hide from God." Millions of people around the world hide from God—in religion. That's what they are doing because, if you get too close to this angry, judgmental God, He'll whack you. And so we try to appease Him through religion—and religion simply couldn't tolerate Jesus.

The Hebrew people believed with all their hearts that the Messiah would fulfill *their* agenda—that when Jesus was entering Jerusalem, He would enter as a King and fulfill their agenda to conquer Rome and to give them their own nation. That wasn't Jesus' agenda, but it was their agenda. And when Jesus didn't do things their way, their excitement turned to hurt and disappointment, which turned to anger, which turned to hatred, that within five days they would torture Him and crucify Him.

The world is filled with people like that. As an expression of our desire to be our own god, we have an agenda and we expect God to fulfill our agenda. And when God doesn't play the game, when God doesn't do it *our* way, we get hurt. We get disappointed and then we get angry. And then there's this hatred and then there's this division. We create a God who is distant, a God that we are afraid of, a God that's going to whack us. We take control of our own lives but we make a mess of our lives—and religion just makes us feel worse and we don't know what to do. We feel ourselves crawling back but the whole scene feels hopeless. Millions and millions and millions of people feel that pain.

We fail to realize that the whole purpose for Jesus coming was to seek and to save the lost. God isn't a distant God that hides somewhere, angry and judgmental, waiting to whack people. He's a lover whose heart is broken because we are hiding in the trees. He's calling out that we might know that He came to seek and to save the lost. He's the pursuer. He's the One coming after you. He's not coming to whack you. He's not coming after you to yell at you. He's coming after you to offer you His salvation that He freely offers as a gift because He wants to walk with you in the garden, in the cool of the day. He wants to know you. He wants to share life with you and He wants to spend forever with you. That's what the whole story is about.

I don't know where you've been. I don't know what you've done; I don't know what's been done to you. But with all my heart, I know this to be true—that this morning, if you listen, you can still hear God's voice crying out to you, "Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?"

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