

25.11.07 Genesis 2.1-17

Many people love tracing their family history. Finding out who your ancestors were, and where they came from, gives you a deep perspective on who you are, and where you've come from.

There's a TV programme, isn't there, where celebrities go tracing their own family roots: "Who Do You Think You Are?".

I've never been tempted to go into my family tree - it wouldn't be easy with a common, dull surname like mine.

You may not know your family history back into history. But in the Bible God does take us right back to the beginning, and show us the beginnings of the family-history which every single member of the human race shares.

And God shows us our beginnings not just for our amusement - he's telling us who we are by showing us where we've come from.

So let's look together at Genesis chapter 2 - do find it in the Bible, right at the beginning. By looking back into our origins it's as if we're looking into a mirror - a mirror that tells us who we are, and what our lives are for.

In last week's sermon we looked at some of the big questions about science and creation that most people ask when they read Genesis - and if you missed that, you can catch up by listening to it or reading it on the church website, or by ordering the tape from the Information Table out in the Welcome Area.

But this morning we're coming back to focus on the key things that God is clearly revealing to us in Genesis. And what we find is that chapter 2 focuses in on the creation of humanity.

Chapter 1 gave us the big picture of our creation - turn back to verse 26 [READ 1.26-29].

Chapter 2 homes in on us as being created in God's image, and it spells out even more deeply who we are and where we've come from.

The first thing God wants us to take to heart here is this:

1. We are made for life with God (verses 1-15).

Every single human being whom God has made is made to share life with him - to live their life walking spiritually with him.

It starts when we were made from the ground - look at 2.7 [READ verse 7a].

I don't know whether or not God intends us to take those words as literal or symbolic. Elsewhere in the Bible it speaks in picture-language of God as giving us all birth the way a potter produces a clay pot by and moulding and shaping it. So this in

Genesis might also be picture-language. Or of course God could easily have made Adam directly from the earth if he chose to.

There's something fascinating about the name 'Adam'. Genesis was originally written in Hebrew - and Adam is also simply the Hebrew word for 'man.'

And the Hebrew word for 'ground' is 'adamah'. We are 'Adam' - and the name reminds you that we were made from 'adamah'.

If you meet a man called Hamish McClintock, it's pretty obvious where he comes from.

And mankind's name in the Bible tells us: we are a creature. Part of God's world.

We are from the ground - and we have been given life by God.

The end of verse 7 [READ]. We are not self-made people. Our life isn't a good idea that had - it is a gift to us from the only one who can give life - God himself.

These are two truths that God that sometimes needs to use to bring us a little low.

When I know what God says I should believe, but I just don't want to trust him - when I know what he commands, but I don't want to obey him - then we need God to remind us, don't we, that we are not God, but are just creatures - made from the dust of the ground.

God does bring us low, when we exalt ourselves too much.

But he also exalts us, when we bring ourselves too low - because he has given us the task of caring for God's world.

Back in chapter 1 verse 26 we are made in the image of God so that we can rule over God's creation. And verse 15 of chapter 2 spells that out for us [READ].

Imagine how privileged and awed a young navy officer would feel if the captain of the warship said: "Right - you take the wheel now - you keep this ship safe for me."

What a privilege for us to be given the task of being God's deputy - his stand-in - his co-worker in taking care of his world. We are to be the image of God by reflecting his character by the way we work in his world.

'Work' isn't just what people get paid to do - their employment. It's all your jobs, your responsibilities - whatever fills your time in God's world.

God is faithful, trustworthy, loving, gracious. He made us to be just the same, as we work in his world - his representative to his world.

Now I do need to say something here about the garden of Eden. The Bible makes clear that it was a real place. From verse 10 to verse 14 there are rivers described which are real, such as the Tigris and the Euphrates - God is literally putting Eden on the

map - we can't be sure where, but somewhere to the east of Israel.

And Eden was the place where mankind could be who he was made to be, enjoying the blessings of God and his creation.

The God who made us is a good and generous God. Look at verse 9 [READ verse 9a].

He gave us a world that would feed us... A world that would delight us when we stop and look at it - its mountains, its sunsets.

Can you recall one day in life when everything in the world felt that it was "just as it should be", and you couldn't be happier? That is the world as God created it to be.

There's a word the Bible sometimes uses to describe that happy state of affairs. It's the word 'rest'.

In the Bible 'rest' doesn't mean 'putting your feet up'. It means: 'enjoying life with God as it's supposed to be.'

And it comes right at the beginning of chapter 2 [READ verses 1-3].

This seventh day is different from the other six in chapter 1, because we're not told how the day ends - it seems as if it goes on for ever.

And God's eternal 'rest' is something that we can share in, when we orient our lives in line with him.

Now next week we're going to come to chapter 3 of Genesis - and we'll read the sorry story of how mankind chose to walk away from the peaceful 'rest' of life with God.

So how is this rest restored? How can paradise be found again, once it's been lost?

Turn on a long way in the Bible, to Matthew 11.28. Here is Jesus speaking [READ].

Jesus is deliberately making us think of Genesis. If we want restoration back into the life with God that was there in Eden and that we've lost, we will come to Jesus, trust him, love him.

And Jesus is even the fulfilment of the pattern of taking one day of rest in the week - the Sabbath. Turn on further to Colossians 2.16 [READ verses 16-17].

If your life with God has been restored by coming to Christ, then you already enjoy the 'rest' - the life with God - that you were made for. Whether your weekly Sabbath-day is a Sunday, or like me, a Tuesday, doesn't matter. That day is there simply to remind you that you now live for God through Christ, not for work, or money, or for yourself.

That's the life God made us for. It's where we were made to fit. Without that life we will always be a round peg in a square.

But God has a condition. We enjoy...

2. life with God only through obedience to God (verses 16-17).

This is how human life is from the beginning. Turning back in Genesis chapter 2, listen to verse 16 [READ verses 16-17].

God gave Adam a life with him - but it was a life he could lose. He could die - and God's talking here both about physical death - and especially spiritual death, with Adam cut off from life with his creator.

Adam would lose spiritual and physical life if he disobeyed his creator and ate the fruit from the tree that God said he mustn't eat.

(By the way: it's not an apple! The Bible doesn't say what the forbidden fruit was. Making it an apple is just one of those made-up legends.)

Now, what does 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' represent?

It can't represent the ability to know right from wrong - since that's a good thing - and God gave Adam and Eve that moral sense right from the start.

The clue is over the page, in what God says after they have sadly eaten its fruit - chapter 3. verse 22 [READ].

'Knowledge of good and evil' is something God has, and we shouldn't have. So it means: 'deciding for myself what's right' - living life by the rules that I make for myself - regardless of what God my creator says about my life.

So this tree stands for the human desire to stop God being God, and to take his place for myself.

It is the original human temptation - and it is the original sin that every single human being ever since has inherited and repeated.

We repeat it every day, when what we want to do and believe is more important to us than what God says we should do and believe.

Of course we want to ask: why does life with God come with conditions attached? Why is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there in the first place? Isn't God being cruel - like putting a big bar of chocolate in front of someone who you know loves chocolate - and then blaming them when they eat some of it?

But we've seen, haven't we, how generous and kind God is here - how he provides so lavishly for us in his world.

And what this tree represents is that relationships aren't automatic. They can go wrong.

If want a relationship that can never go wrong, you won't search the lonely hearts ads looking for a person - you'll build yourself a robot that obeys everything you say.

But that's not much of a relationship, is it. For relationships you need people who are committed to each other. God is committed to us, and made us to be committed to him - but that means that we are people who can walk away from him if we choose.

That's what the tree represents.

And God is so good that when the human race did walk away from him, he offered us a future that would be even more glorious than just Eden restored - he offers us a new creation.

You see the Bible ends in a way that brings Eden to mind - but is even greater.

Turn to the very last page of the Bible, Revelation 22.1 [READ verses 1-2].

This is greater than Eden in one fundamental way.

There's no tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There's just the tree of life, standing for the blessing of an eternal, unbreakable life with God.

“Life with God comes only through obedience to God”. So you might think that what you've got to do is go away and obey the Ten Commandments a bit better.

But that is not what God requires. He put Adam in the garden to work the land. But then, as we'll see next week, he ejected humanity from the garden when they rejected him. So what 'work' does God require of us now to get back into Eden - to get our lives back on track with him?

Jesus gives a wonderful answer to that.

Turn back to John's Gospel, 6.28-29 [READ].

Obey God - by trusting in Jesus. The 'work' God requires isn't really something you do at all, is it - it's the same as it's been ever since Eden - it's a relationship.

Our only hope for life with God now, and life with God for eternity, is to obey God's big command about Jesus. Come to Christ, trust in him. If that work is not there in your life, you don't know God and you won't be in his new creation.

But if we have to come Christ, then Eden restored - and even greater - is our certain future.