

Anyone for Spare Ribs?

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[0 : 00] Amen. In the evenings we're preaching through the book of Genesis, the first few chapters of the whole Bible.

What's your ideal place? What's your picture of paradise in your mind? Probably for most of us it's a place that's peaceful.

Probably a place that's quiet. Probably a place that doesn't have any rain. Probably a place where there are few people. We wouldn't want a place where there's nobody else.

I imagine that all of us, if we pictured paradise, would have at least some one person at least there with us. For many of us we might think of paradise as a place with a nice little gentle stream, a river flowing through a garden or a park, something green, something pleasant, something where you can have a nice long eternal picnic.

We'd want a place that doesn't have any flies, mosquitoes, spiders and snakes of course. We'd want a place that's got freedom. We'd want a place that's got beauty. We want a place that's got everything provided for us.

[1 : 31] Everything at hand. And I imagine that if you're picturing perfection or paradise now in your mind, you are probably not thinking of a place where you would work. Now probably some of you have got a place in mind.

The other day I was at Walhalla up in the hills north of Mowi and it's not quite paradise because there isn't electricity on so you'd get the noise of a generator all the time producing your electricity.

But it was very idyllic, peaceful, quiet. I guess it was out of the tourist season. There's a nice little stream running through the town. Some nice reconstructed buildings. Green hills and a cricket ground.

Almost everything you need. Didn't have a chocolate cake shop. Genesis 2 is a picture of paradise. It's called the Garden of Eden but the word Eden is related to a word for paradise.

So that's what we're talking about in the story of Genesis chapter 2. Now for many of us when we heard it read we probably think, oh this is really a bit of a child story isn't it?

[2 : 30] The making of Adam and Eve. You know once upon a time there was a big giant and there was a fairy godmother. That sort of stuff. But of course this is much more than that. This is a story that has profound truth about God, his purposes, his world and his people.

The opening of the story is a bit strange. It's a world unlike the world which we know. The world as it was before the creation of mankind.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up. We think, well that's a bit strange. Then the writer tells us why that's the case.

For the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth. So it's ideal cricket weather. The trouble is there's no grass for the ground. And there was no one to till the ground. But a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground.

It's an underground stream rather than rain coming down upon the ground. The reason why it's like that and there's no trees growing is there are no cultivated trees growing.

[3 : 37] That's the picture here. Why? Because there's no rain to water them and there's no person to till them and look after them and prune them and sow seeds and all those sorts of things.

It's the situation of the world before mankind was made. And then in verse 7, the key to this sentence is God making man. Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground.

The word for man is the word Adam. And some translations of the Bible use the proper name Adam here. It's hard to know when in Genesis you call it the man and when you call him Adam.

But the key is that the word for ground or soil or dirt is a Hebrew word Adama. And so the play on words is that God forms Adam from Adama.

We might say in English the closest I could come up with was an earthling from the earth. They're related. They belong together in a sense. And it's not so much dust as though it's something that would just drift through our fingers.

[4 : 41] You can't form much out of dust. Really it's just a clod of earth that God uses to form like a potter uses clay or a goldsmith gold. That's the idea. The same words used to form man from this clod of earth.

Not so much mud which is all sloppy but something that's a bit more solid. The German word apparently Martin Luther used this in his commentary. And I say it not because it's an important word because it sounds nice.

It's Erdenkloss. Isn't that a nice sounding word? Well that's a lump of earth in German. And that's what's going on here. That's what we're made out of you men. Erdenkloss.

Try and remember that. You women to call your man. Erdenkloss. But of course we're not just that either. We're not just a lump of dirt.

Because as it goes on to say in verse 7. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being. Now sometimes people think that what this verse is saying is that we are a body.

[5 : 42] That's what's been made out of the thing of the ground. And then God gives us a soul. He breathes into us a soul. So that we as people are body and soul.

That's a wrong understanding of what this verse is saying. It does use a word that is sometimes translated as soul. But here it really means just a living being. We as living beings are body and soul if you like.

But integrated together. You can't separate the two. We're a unity. An integrity. Rather than two things sort of side by side. And the point of it is that we're not just a lump of matter.

But God has given life to this man. And indeed this is a model for what he does for all of us. For all human beings. It certainly doesn't mean in this verse that human beings are unique compared to other animals.

Because in chapter 1 and later on in Genesis. Other animals, even birds, are called living creatures. Exactly the same expression that comes here. So this is not saying that we are unique in relationship to God.

[6 : 48] We saw that last week in chapter 1. We are unique. But not from this verse are we unique. We are living beings and integration of God's breath if you like and physical matter.

Integrated together as a living being. At least that was the first man. And as I say a model for people in general. It reminds us though that we are dependent upon God for our life.

That's something I think we need to hear in our day and age. We are not dependent upon our doctors, our nurses, our hospital system and certainly not our government. We are not dependent upon our medicines.

We are not dependent upon our diet or the climate. We are dependent upon God for our life. Now those other things are important and it's important to live wisely and healthy.

But God is the giver of life. Not us or somebody or something else. God and God alone is the giver of life. Now God doesn't make this man and put him in a vacuum.

[7 : 52] But rather he provides everything for this man. So in verse 8, The Lord God planted a garden in Eden. Eden's the area. The garden is within Eden.

And it's in the east. Presumably east of Israel or Palestine. And presumably that means somewhere like Iran or Persia or Mesopotamia. That is modern day Iraq, Kuwait sort of place.

There was the garden in Eden. And there he put the man whom he had formed. Not only that out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

Now that's a pretty astonishing thing that God provides for this man. Every tree that is good for the sight and good for food. It doesn't just mean some that are beautiful and some that are good for food.

Like when you go to a restaurant and you see the menu and think, Well they're all very nice but I really fancied something else tonight. Everything is there. This is almost an endless menu of things that are good for food and good for sight.

[8 : 58] Pleasing to the eye. Now if I were trying to picture what this would be like, I would imagine that all these trees constitute a black forest. Because one of my favourite foods is black forest cake.

So if they're trees that are providing good food, it must be a black forest in my mind. So that therefore it would produce black forest cakes. Well you picture it how you like. But that's the idea here. That this is a place of great abundance and everything that you could enjoy is provided by God.

Whether it's black forest cakes or Vegemite sandwiches. But there are two particular trees that are mentioned here. Two very important trees. The end of verse 9.

The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life doesn't occur again in Genesis. But it does at the end of the Bible.

The tree of life is almost a symbol if you like of a relationship with God. And living forever in relationship with God. The tree of life is a symbol of eternal life if you like.

[10 : 04] Life with God. And that was available, accessible for this man in the Garden of Eden. He could eat of that tree and picking up what it says about it in the New Testament.

Symbolically continue to enjoy life forever with God. Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We'll come to that in a minute. This garden of course has a river.

Because every pretty garden has to have a river that runs through it. But it's hardly a little stream or creek. This is the river that feeds water to the whole world. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden.

And from there it divides and becomes four branches. Which is fairly unusual because most rivers actually accumulate other rivers. Getting bigger and bigger as they go. This is a river that splits.

Rather than rivers or tributaries all coming into one big river. And the river splits into four rivers. Probably symbolically showing that the water of God from the source which is God.

[11 : 06] Goes to the four corners of the earth. Two of the rivers are well known. Two are not known. The first two. The name of the first is Pishon. We don't know what that was.

Apparently it flowed around the whole land of Havilah. Which most people think is probably an ancient name for a place in the area of Arabia or Persia. There's gold. And the gold is good.

Bedellium and onyx stone are there as well. The second river is called the Gihon. There happens to be a Gihon spring in Jerusalem. The main spring that provided water to Jerusalem.

But that doesn't quite fit here. Because this Gihon is the river that flows around the whole land of Cush. Which was an ancient name for an area like Ethiopia and North Africa. So some people think this is probably referring to the Nile.

It may well be that the original readers of course knew what these four rivers were. But two of them we no longer know or understand what they were. That ought not to trouble us. The last two of the Tigris and Euphrates still called the same running through modern Iraq.

[12 : 08] But of course the point is that whether Tigris and Euphrates and whatever the other two rivers are. They don't have a common source. Tigris and Euphrates both flow into the Persian Gulf. But they don't have a common source.

This is in a sense inverted what is natural about rivers in the world. It's probably making the point that life here symbolized through water going through all the world.

Derives from God at the center of Eden. Which is God's place and where God dwelt on earth. Well it's a bit like paradise isn't it?

Everything you'd like to eat. Beautiful to look at. Nice pleasant little stream running through. But here the picture of paradise breaks down. For in the next verse we get what we don't expect in paradise.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. Work. Monday to Friday. Work.

[13 : 08] Indeed then it was probably Sunday to Friday. Work. Hardly a picture of paradise is it? And yet that ought to just make us aware that work is part of God's good plan for this world.

It's not just something we of necessity have to do. It's not a drudgery that we have to go to. We actually ought to think of our work in positive terms. As part of our stewardship of this world of God's.

Which we're given to look after. Yes to till and to keep meant being a shepherd or a gardener. But of course in our age we have different types of things and most of us probably aren't shepherds and gardeners.

But in the end we all have the same responsibility to look after God's world. It's not ours. It's his. But we are his tenants in this world. It ought to challenge us to think positively of our work.

Yes of course since the picture of perfection here our work is not as easy as it ought to be. We'll see some of that next week and why that's the case. But nonetheless work is not an evil and not a bad thing.

[14 : 11] It is something that is good. The writer goes on to tell us about two more things in the garden. One is of a great permission. And one is a prohibition.

The opposite. The permission in verse 16 is that you may freely eat of every tree of the garden. There are many many trees. Every tree that is good is there.

And you may freely eat of them. Not just a little bit. But in a sense as much as you want. Isn't that a great picture? You know you go to eat chocolate cake and you just get given a little bit. Or you know that if you eat too much it might make you sick.

This is a picture of eat as much as you want. No parent telling you you can only eat so much here. This is freedom to eat of every tree in the garden.

That's a great generous God who's allowing that. But the prohibition comes in the next verse. The prohibition is that of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.

[15 : 10] For in the day that you eat of it you shall die. Now some people think that God's a stingy God. Some people think that God is all about rules and what we're not allowed to do. Don't do this.

Don't do that. Sort of like a nagging mother. Some people think that God's like that. Preventing us from having any fun at all. I remember a comedy script once that had in it the line, God here, don't have fun.

Now get this right, this prohibition. The verse before it said you can eat of any tree in the garden, except the one that's about to be mentioned, freely, as much as you like.

And there is every tree that is good that is there. Not just a few, but every tree that is good that is there. There is only one tree that the man is unable to eat from.

Now that's not a stingy God, is it? That's a God who's given you a most extensive menu to pick from. Every food you could think of that you like is on the menu.

[16 : 09] There's just one thing you're not allowed to eat. But surely, with such provision by God that is generous, that one prohibition ought not to be a problem.

And yet, of course, we know, as we'll see next week, it becomes so. But you see, the point is that God's not stingy. He's not a God who's stopping people having fun. He's not a God who's planted man in the garden and said, here is a tree that produces chocolate cakes, but you're not allowed to eat it.

And the only other tree is a tree that produces Vegemite sandwiches and that's what you've got to eat. I don't like Vegemite sandwiches and that would be a stingy God if it were me. But this is a God who's provided trees of great abundance and variety that are good.

There is only one that is prohibited. Now, what is this tree of the knowledge of good and evil? It's obviously something symbolic. Oh, maybe originally there was a real tree.

But it's obviously talking about something a bit more significant than actually picking a bit of fruit from a tree. What is it? Well, people aren't quite sure. Some people think that it's the ability of everything.

[17 : 19] Now, I must say in qualifying this, it's that the reason people say something like that is that later on, we'll see next week, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means that you become like God.

So what must it be to become like God? Some people think it's to know everything there is to know. But the trouble is that when Adam and Eve do eat of the tree in the next chapter, they don't know everything.

Some people think that it's sexual knowledge because the word to know and the word knowledge have some sexual connotation in ancient Hebrew in some places. But what would that mean to become like God?

Does it mean that God has sexual relations? That's never given in the Bible. And besides, in chapter 1, as we saw last week, sexual relations are a positive and good thing given by God.

So it's clearly not that either. Some people think it means the consequences of how you respond to the tree. What I mean by that is to say, if you eat of it, you will know evil.

[18 : 18] And if you don't eat of it, that is if you obey God, you will know what it means to do good. The trouble is the expression is to know both, not one or the other. It seems the best way of understanding what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is about is that if you eat of it, you're making a claim to decide what is good and to decide what is evil.

That is, you're making a claim to be like God, a claim for what's called moral autonomy. I decide what is right and I decide what is wrong. I'm playing God here.

But you see, that's God's prerogative and God's prerogative alone. And that's why he prevents the man from eating of that tree. Eating of the tree, of the knowledge of good and evil, is a claim to be like God.

And God prevents that from happening. Despite the fact that man is the most exalted being that God made, as we saw last week, despite that exalted status that he has, man is not God.

There is a distinction between God and the creation, the creator and the creation. And the prohibition from eating that tree keeps that distinction there.

[19 : 39] Now you might think the Garden of Eden is just a little story that's in ancient times and is unimportant. But I'll just show you just a couple of ways in which the Garden of Eden is actually quite an important theme for us as Christians in the Bible.

The Garden of Eden is the place where God and man are in perfect harmony together, living together, an intimacy of relationship between them. God is present with the man that he has made and shortly with the woman that he makes as well.

Now we know, of course, from this well-known story of Adam and Eve eating the fruit in the Garden of Eden, that that intimacy, that harmony, is broken very quickly. And Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden.

We'll see that next week. But later on in the Bible, we see a lot of allusions back to the Garden of Eden. And in particular, they're associated with the temple that is built at the center of the people of God's life in Jerusalem.

The temple is full of gold like the Garden of Eden had. The precious stones that are in the Garden of Eden are there in the temple and in the garments that the priest wore. The temple has its door opening to the east, the same as the Garden of Eden.

[20 : 55] We'll see that more clearly next week. Furthermore, in the temple, there was flowing water for washing and cleansing and purifying. And in a later vision in the Old Testament about the temple, indeed, it was more than just a bit of flowing water.

It was the whole river of life, as we find in the Garden of Eden here in Genesis 2. Jerusalem, which is where the temple was, we told in the Psalms, the psalmist sings, the praise of Jerusalem by saying there is a river that makes glad the city of God.

It's the same river as the river of life here in Genesis 2. But what's even more convincing about the illusions of the temple going back to the Garden of Eden is that the job the priests have in the temple is exactly the same as the man in the garden, to till and to keep.

Not meaning being a shepherd or a gardener in a temple, you can't do that, but to look after and care for and guard. They're the only places in the Bible where the same two words come together to do with the priest in the temple and the man in the garden.

Now if you think, oh, this is all a bit complicated and obscure, let me say the point that I'm trying to make here. After Israel had risen as a nation and built a temple, the symbolism of the temple was God being present with his people.

[22 : 14] And so the symbolism picked up things from the Garden of Eden. The stones, the gold, the water, the tilling, the keeping, and so on. It was a symbolic way of approaching back to what the Garden of Eden would have been like.

But of course it was just a symbol because God wasn't at present with his people anymore in the same way that he'd been back in the Garden of Eden. There was now a distance between them, the distance created by the sins of the people.

That's why they went to the temple to offer a sacrifice to atone for their sins. When we get to the very end of the Bible, the last two chapters of the book of Revelation, which is the last book of the Bible, we find there the same symbolism occurring.

Precious stones around the walls of the city of New Jerusalem, the picture of heaven. We find gold there, gold that's just clear like glass. We find there the river of life and indeed the tree of life.

All sorts of symbolism about the Garden of Eden. No temple because there in heaven God and his people dwell in a perfect harmony together. No longer does God keep himself away from his people.

[23 : 25] But he's back to where he was in the Garden of Eden but probably even better than that. And the key to that picture at the end of the Bible is that the entry back into God's presence is through Jesus Christ.

Now the point I'm trying to make is the picture at the beginning of the creation was of perfection which humanity spoiled. We see that story next week. And the way it's recovered because that's what the whole of the Bible is on about, recovering that beginning picture but indeed recovering it in a better way.

Jesus is the entry back into the better garden if you like. So I'm trying to say that the Garden of Eden is a very important theme. It explains to us what God is on about in his creation.

He's not just making a world or making people to do what they want. He's making a world with people to look after that world but in harmony and relationship with him. And when mankind spoils that relationship God is on about rebuilding it.

And the way the Bible tells us he did that is through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Well let's cover the last little bit of this chapter. One of the reasons we sing choruses in church is because they're easy to learn and easy to remember.

[24 : 42] Do you remember the chorus we saw last week when we looked at Genesis 1? All sorts of lines that get repeated and one of them was each day after God had made various things the first, the second, third, fourth and fifth and then sixth days God saw what he'd made and it was good.

And on the sixth day he actually said and it was very good because that's when he made us. But now when we get to chapter 2 verse 18 we find the opposite of that.

Then the Lord God said it is not good. For the first time we get a hint of something that is imperfect. Something that is still lacking.

And what is it that's lacking? It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner. There is something wrong about a man or a person who is in total isolation.

We're not made for that. We're made for relationship with each other. There's something wrong about somebody who's totally antisocial and cuts themselves off from other people. We're not made by God to be like that.

[25 : 54] Now some people understand this making of a helper is sort of somebody to help around the house and do the vacuuming and the kitchen work. Fairly derogatory view of females it seems to me because of course God goes on to make a woman.

But the word helper is actually a word of mutual mutuality or complementarity. She is made from the rib literally the side not from the head as though she would rule over him not made from his feet as though he would trample over her but made from his side so they'll be next to each other equal mutual and complementary to each other.

And the helper does not suggest she is a servant of him because indeed one of the most common ways the word helper is used in the Old Testament is to speak of God for his people.

God is the helper who comes to the aid of his people. You could hardly say that God is subordinate to his people can you? Nor can we say that woman is subordinate to man on the grounds of this verse.

Well God provides a zoological procession all the animals and the things that God has made come past Adam and he names them but then at the end of this procession at the end of verse 20 a sad little comment there was not found a helper as his partner.

[27:16] You imagine standing there and seeing every animal that God had made the extinct ones as well as the ones that are still living all processing past you you name them but you know that's not my helper that's not the one who's going to give me companionship and relationship and at the end of that line the last thing that goes past a zebra or zec or whatever alphabetical order they're in no it's not for me and the line stops there's a sense of sadness at the end of this verse God has to do something special now to meet the need and so the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man must have been a very big sleep for him to take out a rib and then sew it back without the man waking up probably an ancient form of divine anaesthetic but it's probably also suggesting this is a mystery we don't understand how God did this and he took one of the ribs literally the side he closed up its place with flesh and the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man it's quite a beautiful picture really because in the ancient world marriages were arranged marriage and God here is the matchmaker man's woken up from his deep sleep and God walks over with a woman and said this is your wife just like an ancient arranged marriage and Adam doesn't look at her and say oh how ugly he doesn't say no no no

I'd prefer the zebra he rejoices he says this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh we would say this is my flesh and blood but the ancient expression was bone and flesh this one shall be called woman for out of man this one was taken there's again a play on words here she is an isha I am an ish they're the Hebrew words they're related to each other you see this man and this woman belong to each other she's sort of made out of him same flesh and blood same substance complementarity belonging together in a way that no other animal does and the writers comment in verse 24 is therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh the point of that verse is not so much to tell us how to get married but to say why a husband and wife are one flesh because they've come from the one flesh in the past explains the appropriateness of marriage

I guess it doesn't mean that everyone ought to be married it explains why marriage is an appropriate thing for a man and a woman notice also some principles that the man leaves his father and mother in the ancient world the man would if not stay in the parents house stay close to the parents and she would leave her parents and come to where his are it's not denying that but it's saying that even if they live in the same geographical location or even same house he leaves them for her that is the relationship between spouses is more important than the filial relationship of a parent to a child and that same principle must stand today as well it was more striking then than it is now but it's something for those of you who are married to remember your first allegiance above any other is to your spouse not your parent or child he is to cleave or cling to her as it says here to leave his parents and cleave to her the idea is of both passion and permanence commitment that is going on here between the two and they shall be one flesh not talking about sexual relations but marriage itself being married makes them one flesh not the sexual consummation of the marriage marriage you see is instituted by God it's clear from this verse that it's meant to be monogamous despite many examples in the Old

Testament where even kings are polygamists that is they have many wives never says that that's right indeed those who are polygamists always get themselves into trouble monogamy is God's ideal marriage is meant to be permanent not for as long as you feel an emotion but it is to be for as long as those two people are alive it's a man and a woman it's meant to be heterosexual her name was Eve not Steve after all there is to be harmony unity intimacy and mutuality in marriage it's only later in the Old Testament and then in the New as well we find that marriage is also a symbol for God's love for us let me encourage those of you who are single as I am it is okay to be single this is not telling us that we ought to be or must be married there is a place for singleness and Jesus is the prime example of that it doesn't mean that there is something inadequate in a person who is single either Christians could do well I think to model good singleness and acceptance of singleness because our society does not the final comment of the writer is the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed not as though they would have guilt that's not the sense of shame but it wasn't a matter of concern to them let me conclude much of our world is trying to establish little plots of paradise many of us have an idyllic view of what retirement will be like no work nice little house all paid for nice little garden to tend golf on

Mondays and Thursdays cook lunches freedom beauty companionship all those sorts of things but very often our picture of paradise has one ingredient missing because paradise is God's place where God dwells with his people and it's also clear from here throughout the Bible that the only way we get to paradise is not through saving up a nice superannuation fund but through Jesus Christ for he and he alone is the entry point into paradise let's pray God we thank you that you made this world so good and that you made everything that we need in this world thank you that you're a gracious giver who provides abundantly generously and lovingly for your people and thank you that you have done so not just in this world and the trees and the food and the houses and so on but above all in providing the Lord Jesus

[33 : 59] Christ that our sins may be forgiven that we may be reconciled to you and that we may enter into your heaven forever your paradise and enjoy life forever with you amen