

The Heavens and the Earth

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[0 : 0 0] If you weren't here last week, we started a new series just for three weeks. The series is called Foundational Things. We're looking at Genesis 1, 2, and 3. Foundational things about who we are, about the world we live in, and most of all, foundational things about God himself.

Today, we're at week two. And I want to start with a question. When I say home, what is the place or where is the place you think of? When I say home, where is the place you think of?

What makes it home? Is it the place or is it the people? Is it a combination of both? I rang a few people or contacted a few people from the church this week who were born overseas, and I asked them, do they still consider that place home or is Melbourne what you say now?

And I suppose lots of other people in this room here were born overseas or born interstate or even born in the country. Do you consider Melbourne or Australia your home or is it the place where you're from?

A few personal examples. So my dad over there. My dad was born overseas. And this week, I asked my dad if he still considers India his home or is, you know, where is it now?

[1 : 1 7] And he said after nearly 50 years in Melbourne, he's finally coming around to this being the place. My wife, Rachel, sitting next to my dad, Rachel's from Tasmania.

And every now and then she gets really homesick and wants to go home. In fact, this week she's going back there, leaving me to fend for myself all alone. Speaking of fending for myself, I lived in the UK for nearly 10 years and I used to get terribly homesick for Melbourne, particularly at Christmas or and summertime as well.

In our passage today, we see the place that God calls home. It's an extraordinary picture and it's designed to loosen our grip on this place.

Our author wants us to become homesick so that we long to be with God. See, we only just met God last week, Genesis 1, when he created the world.

We said the universe was divided into either you are God or something made by God. Last week, he created in big brushstrokes, just six days to make everything.

[2 : 2 4] But today, things slow down. We get a much more intimate picture. Today is very focused on the man and the woman he created. Because today, God makes a garden, a home where he will dwell with them.

So this is point one. And you should have a handout on the inside. It's not a handout, sorry. Just the inside cover of your bulletin will tell you where we're going today. Let me read from Genesis 2, verse 5.

Follow along with me. Now, no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up. For the Lord God had not set rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground.

But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. The earth is sort of pregnant with life. There are shrubs and plants. They're all ready to appear. And God, he's just caretaking, just keeping everything watered.

Because God is waiting for one more thing. Verse 7. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

[3 : 31] And the man became a living being. In verse 8, he gives this man a home. Now, the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden. And there he put the man he had formed.

And as we look at the Garden of Eden, the word that comes to mind is paradise. Verse 9 says it has all kinds of trees. And not just ones that are for food, but ones that are, it says, pleasing to the eye.

God takes pleasure in how beautiful his garden is. Last week, he made everything with a word. But today, he's planting and forming and making.

Very hands-on today. Very intimate, it is. Verse 10 and 11. They speak of all the rivers. That means Eden is well watered. It won't suffer drought like the farmers.

And it won't suffer those terrible bushfires either. The garden is a picture of vitality and life. Richness also. Verse 11. It says, around the region of Havilah, there is gold.

[4 : 35] And I love verse 12. Just like a side note. The gold of that land is good. 24-carat paradise, can we say? Just casually mentioned by the by.

Aromatic resins, probably like incense. Precious stones too. Again, just a side note. Just mentioned by the by. Because after all, this is God's home. Verse 15.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it. And take care of it. It's really interesting, isn't it? That work is mentioned here. I guess for a lot of people, their idea of paradise might be to stay on summer holidays.

But work is very much part of God's good design. The man was meant to be a worker. It's inherent to who he is. And every day, he gets his dream job of looking after paradise.

But notice what comes next. Verse 16. And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[5 : 41] For when you eat of it, you will certainly die. And on the surface, this is a rule about fruit and trees. But underneath, this is the terms of a covenant or a relationship.

You see, there is the creator outside the universe and the man and woman inside the universe. How is a relationship between them going to be possible?

How will they dwell together in the garden? And the answer is obedience. Obey God, the man will have life. Disobey God, eat that fruit, and he will certainly die.

The way people relate to God is through obedience. This is a foundational thing about being human. We're on an unequal footing with God.

He's the creator. He tells us how best to live. We're the creatures. We obey if we want a full and blessed life. And we're not saying that obedience means we're saved.

[6 : 45] Relationship and salvation are very different things. Besides which, by Genesis 2, Adam has done nothing that he needs to be saved from. Obey God for relationship.

Disobey God. And Adam will certainly die. It's pretty simple stuff. I'm sure it will all be fine. Let's go back to the garden. Because for the first time in the garden, something is not good.

Look at verse 18, everyone. The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

This is not, as some people teach, that man was merely lonely. Poor Adam. He got tired of talking to the squirrels. He wanted someone for his tandem bicycle or something like that.

The issue is much more than companionship. The issue is help. See, on his own, Adam is not good enough or fit enough to take care of the garden.

[7 : 47] He's unfit for purpose. He needs a helper. Verse 19 and 20, God conducts the search for a supermodel. Verse 20, But for poor old Adam, no suitable helper was found.

Suitable here means corresponding. You see, God brought all the creatures in the world to Adam, and none of them corresponded or fit him or complimented him in a suitable way.

And so verse 21 and 22, with a hands-on approach, Adam is so ecstatic, he writes the very first Valentine's card.

Verse 23, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken from man. You see, there was one bone and one flesh, but now two, two separate people, two bones, two fleshes.

But they are so like one another, they're so made for each other, that Adam says, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.

[9 : 14] And verse 24, is the Bible's key verse about their marriage. That is why a man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

So a man leaves his father and mother, a public leaving of mum and dad's house, to start a new house, united to his wife, an exclusive, permanent, lifelong union, and they become one flesh.

Their marriage is sealed with physical intimacy, with sex. The Anglican marriage liturgy, it says this, Marriage is the lifelong union, in which a man and woman are called, so to give themselves, in body, mind and spirit.

What therefore God has joined together, let no one put asunder. But God's good design here, has somehow, become offensive, in this place.

A few years ago, I was working in an office, and as you do, when you're working in an office, you start having conversations, and we started talking about marriage. And I chipped in my two cents worth, I said, well, you know, I think marriage is God's good gift.

[10 : 28] And people became quite venomous, and they said, no, no, no, marriage is a man-made institution, for economic arrangement, and the oppression of women. That's what they said.

But, but that is not, the head over heels excitement, Adam shows here, is it? This, now, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, he's clearly in love with her.

Verse, sorry, the Anglican marriage vows, they also say this, I do promise to love, and to cherish. With all that I have, I honor you.

It's not a picture of dominance, is it? Or, an arrangement of, sort of, financial benefits. Verse 24, is God's definition of marriage.

It's mentioned in all eras of the Bible, even, by Jesus himself. You see, God's design, says that Adam and Eve, complement one another, in a way, that no other combination of creatures, is suitable, is fit for purpose.

[11 : 37] And you can see how good the design is, verse 25. Adam and Eve, so Adam and his wife, were both naked, and they felt no shame. It's a good design.

And I realize that this is a really, that's a really hard teaching. Marriage, and divorce, adultery, sexual shame, same-sex attraction.

I think these things touch, probably everyone in this room. But I realize also that, these verses are quite controversial, for lots of people. people, and I think it's because, everyone has a different opinion, on the boundary of sex, and the definition of relationship.

People draw lines and boundaries, in all sorts of places. We all have an opinion, as to what is permissible, and what is taboo. But because we're looking at Genesis, can't we allow the creator, to have a seat at the table too?

Might God, have something valuable to add, when it comes to sex, and relationships, given he invented them? Verse 24, is God's say, on the definition of marriage, and the boundary, of sexual expression.

[12 : 54] A man leaves his father, and the father and mother, is united to his wife, and they become, one flesh. A public, permanent, and physical union, of one man, and one woman, in marriage.

And the challenge, for all of us, when this feels tough, is what we said before. We show our relationship, with God, by the way we obey him.

And when we struggle, with this, we need to remember, that he is our creator. That his boundaries, are there, for our protection, for our good. He is the source, of all good.

We said that, last week. He can be trusted, to know, how sex, and relationship works. He invented them. And so that is a brief picture, of paradise.

And even though, we've looked, sort of to the beginning, of the Bible, we look backwards, God's people, actually need to look, forwards, to the end of the Bible. And so can you flick, to the very end of the Bible please, to Revelation 21 and 22.

[14 : 00] This is our second point. This is the end of the Bible, Revelation 21, 22, end of the Bible, point number two.

You see, God's people, are not going back, to the garden. We are heading, to a city. It's called, the New Jerusalem, a holy city.

It comes down, out of heaven. But we don't have to worry, about missing out, on the garden. Because all the best bits, of Eden, are there, in the city.

And if you like, the best bits of Eden, are supercharged, on steroids, in this city. And so there was marriage, in the garden. But in the city, we'll get an upgraded spouse. Chapter 21, verse 2.

The city is married to God. She is prepared, as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. All that rich stuff, the gold, and the precious stones, they're taken to an extreme. Verse 18.

[15 : 01] The city itself, is made of pure gold. All its gates, are made of precious stones. The sun, the sun before, in the garden.

We don't need that anymore, because 23, verse says, the glory of God himself, will be our light. Adam and Eve, they were made in the image of God, to rule the garden.

But in the city, they're transformed, to the image of Christ. And 22, verse 5 says, we will reign forever, and ever. And finally, just as God made, and ruled the garden, so too, he and Jesus, on the throne, in the garden, in the city.

In fact, the reason paradise, is paradise, has nothing to do, with the gold, and the trees, and the water, and the precious stones. It's because, God and Jesus, are on the throne.

Their rule is unchallenged. That's what makes it, so good. And as we, glimpse these pictures, I don't know how you feel, about all this, good stuff.

[16 : 04] It seems like the author, is rubbing our noses, in how amazing, everything is. And that is deliberate. Because, these pictures of paradise, they are here, to loosen our grip, on this place.

To change our definition, of home. To make us, homesick, for that better place. And that is a huge deal, in the Bible. It takes almost, the whole Bible, to spell out, that transition, from this place, to that place.

Because, while I love the idea, of heaven, I love, this place too. Australia is, the lucky country. It still is. We're not, saying, that Australia is bad, and only heaven is good.

The nuance today, is between, a great life, and eternal life. Between, a great home, and, our true home. Because, as fantastic, as Australia is, I don't think, it compares, to paradise.

So, around here, I shop at Westfield, I'm sure lots of you do, I've seen lots of you, at Westfield actually. Westfield is hardly, the city of gold. I'm pretty sure, that's plain gravel, in our car park, not, you know, gold pavement.

[17 : 21] They aren't precious stones, in the car park, they are rocks. And that is an, aromatic residue smell, it's the exhaust pipe, of the 902 bus. I was on my uncle's farm, in South Australia, recently, and all he wants, is to have, well watered fields, like, the garden, and of course, the bushfires.

It's unbelievable, what's going on. But, imagine if country, New South Wales, and country Victoria, imagine if they had, a river, of living water, flowing through, their towns.

Wouldn't that be amazing? Would you say, that Jesus rule, is honoured, in this place? Do people submit, to his throne, as a good thing, in Australia?

Does Australia, look to Jesus, for light, and life? Our author, wants to loosen, our grip, on this place, so we long, for our true home.

Not so we, hide ourselves away, until we die. Not so that we, walk around discontent, that we neglect the land, and neglect the church, or people who are suffering. But these pictures, of Eden, and the city, they are here, so that we don't, get confused, as to where, our true home is.

[18 : 40] So that we don't, put all the expectations, of paradise, into this place. And that does, raise some challenges. And I put a couple, on your handout. So, where does, my life, show, I am living for.

Does the investment, of my time, and money, and energy, and ministry, prioritize this home, over my true home? Again, the nuance, is between, a great home, and the greatest home.

Between temporary, and eternal, good, and paradise. What I want to do, to finish, is show you, some areas, of life, that, sorry, I'll say it again.

I want to show you some, having a true home, enables you to deal, with the struggles, of this home. So some areas, of this home, that are a bit tough, sometimes. So, death.

In a strange way, this passage, makes us look forward, to death. Because that means, we get to go, home. I'm a bit afraid, of dying. I don't want to die, painfully.

[19 : 46] And I don't want to die, suddenly. I don't want to die, early, or lonely. I'm a little bit, afraid of dying. But I don't have to fear, death. Because this means, Jesus will call me, home.

Painful things, that marriage, and relationship stuff, we talked about earlier, that's very, painful, really tough. Because our longings, for perfect relationships, are real.

They create, a deep ache, within us. But in paradise, they will be fulfilled, in a way, far beyond, what this place, can offer.

And so, obedience to God, in that area, is right. Speaking of painful things, it's okay, to make sacrifices now. FOMO, that's a fear of missing out, that grips us.

Competition with, the people next to us. It's okay, to miss out on things. It's okay, to sacrifice things, for the gospel, to give your time, and money, and energy.

[20 : 45] It's okay, to not strive for power, or the opinions of others, to be possibly, be considered, a laughing stock, in this place. Let them have their moment.

Because in the city, we will rule with Christ, forever and ever. Let them have their moment now. We will rule forever, and ever. Being clear, about our true home, enables us to deal, with the struggles, of this home.

And so that is a picture, of where we belong. Perfect relationships, with one another. No shame, fulfilling, and satisfying work. A paradise, of richness, and beauty, of abundance, and life.

And most of all, to walk, and talk, and see Jesus' face. Again, let me pray. Father God, we praise you, for your home.

We praise you, that it is paradise, because that is, where you live. And thank you, that one day, Jesus will call us home, to that city. And Father, please, would we, not be confused, about which is our true home.

[21 : 58] Help us not to neglect, this place. But help us also, not to put, expectations of paradise, into the here and now. And we pray, Father, that you would, help us, to deal with the struggles, of this life, with our eyes, firmly fixed, on that city.

Please help us, in Jesus' name. Amen.