

Eden

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[0 : 00] Would you pray with me that God would grant us understanding of his word? Heavenly Father, our creator, sustainer, and redeemer, I ask that you open up our minds to understand your truth.

What is truth? Open up our hearts to the transforming power contained in these verses. Take our lives and remake them as we look at your intent for your world that we might better reflect your purposes for us and for your church.

And may we see Jesus even here before the world was not so good anymore and before it needed to be saved, before it needed a savior.

It's in his glorious name that we pray. Amen. Amen. The story of Eden has often been read through the lens of our present world.

Brokenness, separation, riddled with death, wrought through with shame. To look back on Eden for many has become a reason to weep rather than a reason to rejoice.

[1 : 22] But is this how we were intended to see it? Was this why Moses, sitting in a desert somewhere between Sinai and Nebo, took the time to paint us a picture of a land that once was, but is not anymore?

Was this its purpose? Let me answer that through the side door. This is how Calvin described the purpose of scripture.

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, he says, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words.

But when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly. So, scripture, gathering together the impressions of deity, which till then lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness and shows us the true God clearly.

So, scripture, as when aided by glasses, gathers together what we think we see and shows us the true God clearly.

[2 : 48] You see, scripture is our glasses, our corrective lenses. To look at Eden through the brokenness of our world is to misuse it, to mistake it for something that it's not.

You know, I've always wanted glasses. Sometimes when Catherine isn't around, I go and I get hers and I steal them and I go to the mirror and I look through them to see how they look.

And most of the time, it's not looking through them. I'm looking at them. But if I needed glasses and all I ever did was look at them and never took the time to look through them, I will have misunderstood them.

I will have misused them and mistaken them for something they are not. To look at what was meant to correct my vision through the eyes that are already in need of correction is to miss not only the glasses, but also to miss what the glasses would have shown me.

The story of Eden as it's contained in scripture is part of the corrective lens that is meant to gather together for us the impressions of deity that have yet laid confused in our minds to dissipate the darkness and show us the true and living God.

[4 : 23] Our task today is to see Eden rightly and that through Eden we might see rightly.

To remember the story of what once was. Not so much that it will make us weep because it has been lost as we look at it through the brokenness of our world.

But that in remembering it we might be driven to seek it again like Littlefoot. Seeking a great valley as it shows us the true and living God.

To hear of what once was and to hope in the day when it will be again. To do this we'll look at Eden as a land before time. A land before brokenness.

Before separation. Before death. And before shame. A land that once was that might be again. [5 : 28] First Eden was a land before brokenness. Look again at verses 4 to 7. I'd like to point something out that is often missed as we get overly wrapped up in defending God's word at the cost of rightly understanding it.

It says, When we read this, what often becomes the focus is trying to figure out how Genesis 2 fits with Genesis 1.

If you're unfamiliar with the account, we were just told in Genesis 1 that in six days God created the world as we know it. And that by day three the earth had sprouted forth vegetation.

Plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit. But now we're back to empty fields. Before any plants had grown.

And the question is, how do the two fit together? But what I want you to see is that there is something so much more significant to it.

[6 : 54] What we have here isn't speaking of the plants as they were created according to their kinds. It's speaking of something much more specific.

When it talks of the field, shrubs of the field and plants of the field, as Moses said when he penned these words, the picture in our minds shouldn't be the field in which God planted the blank canvas on which he painted his masterpiece.

It's the field in which man would plant. A field to which he would be condemned to plow by the sweat of his brow and the blood of his veins.

And more than a field, it's a wilderness where creek cactuses grow. Shrubs that are good for nothing that I wouldn't even plant in the pathetic garden behind my flat.

The plants of Genesis 2 are those that come after the ground has been cursed. And childbearing has become painful. They're the thorns and the thistles of this world.

[8 : 03] The weeds that are signs of its brokenness. It says, No shrub had yet appeared on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprung forth.

Before the thorns and the thistles, before the brokenness, there was a land. It says, For the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth.

And what should you think of? What should we think of? Should we think that God somehow had his water cycle mixed up? That it took him a while after everything else was done to learn how to hang the clouds in the sky?

No. No, it's not talking of that. We should think. It's saying here that there was a land before Noah. A land before the flood, before judgment, before the waters of heaven.

Baptize the earth. Cleansing it from its wickedness. There was a land before brokenness. There was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

[9 : 09] Then at that time, into that land before brokenness, the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being.

Eden is a picture of what once was. But more so, it's a picture of what will be again one day. Moses, sitting under some rock in the wilderness, when he penned these words, he's led the people out of a land of slavery.

He's leading them into a promised land. And he's saying, you see that tumbleweed over there? You see the cactuses and the weeds growing up over there?

There was a land before all this brokenness. That's the God, he says, we're following to that promised land he's told us about.

A God who created all things good. A God powerful enough and good enough to do it again. Even out of the mess we've wreaked on his world.

[10 : 16] More of that in a minute. Eden was a land of brokenness. Before brokenness.

Second, it was a land before separation. Look at verse 8. It says, Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden. And there he put the man he had formed.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees to grow out of the ground. Trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden, there were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God had created a vast world filled with wondrous beasts and trees, mountains and valleys. The creeping things that creep along the ground.

The birds that fly in the heavens above. The starry hosts that mark out the seasons. It was an untamed world. A wild world. Uncultivated and unkempt.

[11 : 15] In all of its raw splendor. But there was in the midst of this world. In the east. A place that was different.

A place that was special. A garden that God himself planted. We're told that it was there God would walk in the cool of the day.

A place that had been in some sense domesticated. A place he had made home. My mom used to tell me as a child when she was cleaning on Saturday mornings.

That a home is not your home until you've touched every corner. You know, I never really understood what that meant. Until we moved into our last flat in Chicago.

We moved in and the couple before us, they had a dog. Now they also had a teenager, but they had a dog. And this dog wasn't just any dog.

[12 : 19] It wasn't a nice fluffy dog you could put away when you were done with it. It was a monster. They had a teenager and a monster. And this monster shed so much that for a month after we moved into this flat, every Saturday our vacuum would clog.

There was so much fur. We had fur on the top shelf of our bedroom closet. There was fur clogging the internal fan of our freezer.

A home is not a home until you've touched every corner of it.

So what did we do? We swept and we mopped, we painted, we plastered, and we touched every crevice, every crack that we could find. Every cranny.

But here is a place. Eden. Where God has touched every corner.

[13 : 28] He had begun the work of bringing his world in its wild array under his dominion. And into this place, this garden, God placed the man he had made.

Right next to him. Right there. Right in God's own home. He put the man that he had formed. You see, there was a land before separation.

A land before we were wandering in this desert. For 40 years, Moses wandered in the desert while he wrote the books of the law.

Round and around the desert with a stiff-necked generation. And he writes of Eden to say that there was a time we weren't on the outside.

Stuck somewhere between slavery and salvation. Between Egypt and our Eden. But that land that once was, he's saying, get ready because God is bringing us back to himself.

[14 : 35] Our Eden that was lost, he says, God's getting ready to bring us back in. A land flowing with milk and honey. A garden where God dwells with us.

Which we will enter, interestingly, from the east. Out of that land, we're told in verse 10, a river watering the garden flowed.

From there, it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon. It winds through the entire land of Havilla. Where there is gold. The gold of that land is good.

Aromatic resin and onyx are there also. The name of the second is the Gihon. It winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris.

It runs along the east side of Asher. And the fourth is the Euphrates. What a great picture of God's land. A place from which the whole earth was and will be again blessed.

[15 : 42] There was a land before the brokenness. There was a land before separation.

Third, there was a land before all this death. Look at verse 8 again. In the middle of the garden, there was a tree of life and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And verse 15 says, The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And apparently to expand it as he took dominion over the whole earth.

And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden. But there is one tree. You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat from it, you will certainly die. In that day, you will certainly die. Physically, spiritually, eternally.

[16 : 45] Death will reign where life should have. Again, Moses is sitting in a wilderness when he penned these words.

He's already watched the Egyptians drown. For goodness sake, he's already killed an Egyptian himself. And now he's wandering in circles until a generation of his own people fall by the wayside, leaving in their path as they go a stream of corpses behind them.

Against the Canaanites, his people will fight. And in many instances, they will win as they commit entire cities to destruction.

And sometimes they will lose because they will fail to trust in their God. And they will suffer the consequences of dying themselves.

If anyone knew the heartbreak of death, it was Moses. And he's the one who has the audacity to tell us of a land before death.

[18:01] Before death had its way with humanity. Where there was a tree of life.

And the consequence of death had not yet been felt. The question that comes to my mind is, how could he?

How could he? How could he? How could he dare to tell us in the midst of our world where our loved ones die daily in the face of cancer?

Where we live our lives in estrangement from our God. Constantly barricading ourselves from his presence through our sin. Broken and unable to fix it.

Lost in the thorns and the thistles. Lost in the midst of our day. How could he tell us of Eden?

Catherine's grandmother, she was actually from the Aberdeen area.

[19:07] She migrated to the States when she was seven. And is going to celebrate her 100th birthday this fall. A hundred years. She's watched her parents die.

Her friends die. Her husband die. And this past year, on her birthday, she watched her grandson die of a heart attack.

And now she's waiting to die herself. Catherine's boss just got back from the funeral of her grandmother.

It's opened up opportunity to talk about some things that were until now out of bounds. It's a good thing. And to speak into not only her life, but the life of her daughter.

Who's also struggling now significantly in the face of death. Hear me. If Eden is read through the brokenness of our world.

[20:14] Through the lens of our broken world. Where death's sting is still so sorely felt. But that story, for us who hold this book in such high esteem, is an embarrassment.

So speak. Moses, speak. How could you tell us of Eden? And more than just tell us of a land before brokenness, separation, and death.

How could you tell us, finally, of a land before shame? For the first time, we hear that something is not good with God's creation in verse 18.

It says, the Lord God said, It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

When Adam is naming the animals, there's none he names helper.

Not even Jock, his Scottish terrier. If you like Lady and the Tramp. Not even Jock, his Scottish terrier. There's no helper found suitable for him among all the animals.

[21:37] So the Lord God makes a helper from one of the man's ribs. And when he brings her to him, he says, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. Though the point is seen most clearly in the relationship of a man and a wife, when two are joined together to echo back to that first marriage, when a man found in God's gift of a woman that peace of himself that up until that moment he was missing.

Though the point is displayed most vividly in the marriage relationship, it certainly is not lost in relationship in general. Adam and his wife, she who is made of the same stuff of him, were both naked and they felt no shame.

Not before one another. Not before God. When's the last time you felt the absence of shame?

With your wife, your husband, or anyone made of the same stuff as you. Look around. We all trace our roots back to that same couple.

[23:05] When's the last time you felt the absence of shame? We spend our whole lives running from each other.

Anything to cover up, to hide from being exposed. It's one thing if for a moment we forget about shame.

But to say that they were naked and consciously unashamed is massively more significant. There's a reason we can both hate and pity characters like J.R. Tolkien's Gollum from The Lord of the Rings who hide in solitude, confined to their own shameful existence.

There's a reason Frodo can both hate and pity Gollum. It's because Gollum reminds us of ourselves.

Of what we are, or at least what we could be. Of what we once were. If we are not, by the grace of God, still that.

[24 : 22] We know ourselves. I know myself. Naked and unashamed is not me. How can Moses dare to tell us of a land before time, before brokenness and separation, death and shame?

Do you feel the weight of that? I hope you feel the weight of that. This journey through Genesis 2 is so that you feel what it means if you misread Eden through brokenness.

Instead of reading brokenness through Eden. I hope you feel the weight of that. But here's the sweet part.

Moses can tell us of Eden. Because he was not meaning for us to see Eden through the brokenness of our world.

But to see the brokenness of our world through the hope of Eden. I think it's because he wanted his words to be remembered long after he himself had died.

[25 : 41] He wanted us to remember the stories of the past, of that great valley. A great story of what once was.

That rather than bring us to tears, would drive us like Littlefoot. to seek in hope. It once again.

I think Moses tells us of Eden at the very beginning of his story so that we can see, perhaps rightly for the first time, the God that we serve.

That he is a God who created all things good and is in the business of creating all things good and will someday recreate this world in which we live to be good once more.

That what was will one day be again. That's the God we serve. So Eden isn't a reason to weep, but a reason to rejoice.

[26 : 59] Not a picture of something that was lost, but a something that will be regained. It's a picture of hope.

But where's the hope here? And how does it come to bear on our lives? And this is the important piece. If you leave with one thing today, this is what you leave.

You can leave all the desperation behind that came before this. If you see one thing, this is the one thing. You see in Eden an imagery, a language that is picked up in the rest of Scripture to describe as one of the central ways of describing God's program of redemption, an imagery of planting, a language of planting that is not lost with Eden.

After Eden, the language of the garden is used time and time again to describe God's plan to make all things right. Eden's place becomes much more about recreation than about creation.

It's not to say it wasn't about creation the first go around, but that it's more so about who God is than what he once did. It's about what he does over and over and over and over again.

[28 : 37] When the Bible talks of the people of Israel, even Moses picks up the language, entering the promised land. It talks of them as being planted there in a garden, even entering it, interestingly, from the east, the direction that Adam and Eve had been banished from the garden.

They go back in, having in its midst the temple, God's abiding presence, walking with his people in the cool of the day once again, with its vines embroidered into its curtains, and the tree of life standing in its midst in the form of a golden lampstand, an abundance of food born out of the fertility of the land.

And when Israel is exiled from the land, just like Adam and Eve had been, their prophets begin to talk of the day they will be brought back and replanted by God himself.

And even after they come back from exile, the voices of their prophets continue to speak of a day when they will be planted yet again, this time once and for all, to be with their God forever and ever. But what about us? Where do we fit in God's plans of redemption? Where do we stand in terms of Eden's restoration in our own lives?

[30 : 10] Let me suggest four areas we experience God's recreation out of the brokenness and separation and death and shame of our present world.

First, God plants his word in our hearts. By his word, he created the universe.

Do you see the connection there? There was nothing. God spoke and it was. God's word created the universe. And by his word, he remakes us from the inside out.

Whether it is a single event to which we can point back to or a process over which God works on our heart, our first experience of a restored Eden comes when God so graciously leads us to

encounter the power of his word and the center of his gospel, Jesus Christ.

For many of you, you can point back to that experience of the word of God, that initial encounter. What you need to understand is that experience was, for you, your first taste of that land before brokenness and separation and death and shame.

[31 : 35] It was a foretaste of what is to come and on that you stand. If you can't point back to an experience like that, then perhaps you have not yet encountered the heart of Eden.

God's heart for restoring you to what you were meant to be. If all you've known is the brokenness and alienation and death of our world, there's no better place then for you to turn than the pages of scripture.

If you want to hear God's voice and be planted again, it's here where you'll hear it. God plants his word in our hearts.

Secondly, God also plants us in his world. A lot of this imagery comes to a head in the teaching of Jesus, especially the parables.

A sower went out to sow to plant the word of God. Some seed fell on the path, some on rocky ground, others among the thorns, still others on the good soil. And what is the word?

[32 : 47] What is it? The seed is the word. Yet what is sometimes missed in this parable, especially as it appears in the Gospel of Matthew, is the next parable.

When Jesus explains the next, he says, a man sowed good seed in a field. The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.

Not only does God sow his word, he sows his people. He sows his people. What is the seed?

We, we are the seed. God's word planted in our hearts that we might be planted in God's world.

Each of us has been planted by God in a particular place for a particular time.

It's unavoidable. I've tried on many occasions to not be in a particular place at a particular time, and I have failed utterly every time. You cannot not be in a particular place at a particular time at a particular moment.

[34 : 01] You have to be. You're here. God has planted you here, wherever that is, at your job, at your home, your work, here at Bon Accord.

And if you've encountered the word of God and experienced something of Eden, you've been planted here and now for the purpose of pointing others to the experience you've had.

Your job, your home, your favorite coffee place is a means to God's end, a means of fulfilling his purpose for you. And this is to plant the word in the hearts of others.

God plants his word in our hearts. God plants us in his world. Thirdly, God uses us to plant his word in the hearts of others.

One of the beautiful truths of God's redemptive plans is that we who have experienced God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ, who have been sown with the good seed and have, by grace, blossomed as good seed, have the opportunity and the obligation to join God as he replants Eden.

[35 : 15] We become tools for overcoming the brokenness of our world, for bringing people back into relationship with God, and for turning back the hands of time so that they might experience Eden again.

God plants the word in our hearts through the work of Jesus Christ, plants us in his world, and then we join him in planting his word in the hearts of those who have yet to know him.

The question is, where has he planted you? And how are you working to plant his word in the hearts of those he's placed around you?

This life is not much to hold on to. The comfort that is offered us in this here and now is not much to write home about.

We haven't been writing home much about Aberdeen, specifically the weather. It's not much to write home about. And yet, for many of us, it becomes the focus of our life's pursuit.

[36 : 33] If that's the case, maybe we should start asking if we've actually experienced Eden at all. Maybe our issue is that we have not yet seen God and are still trapped in the brokenness and separation and death and shame of our present world.

I said four. God plants his word in our hearts. God plants us in his world. God uses us to plant his word in the hearts of others. But what we need to see is that Moses tells us about Eden of the past so that we begin to look forward to God's planting of the Eden of the future.

God will plant Eden again. Let me read for you the description of Eden to come. It's found in Revelation 21 and 22, the last chapters of our Bible.

It's a great conclusion to the word by which we know our God. Beginning in 21 verse 22, it says, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp.

[38 : 10] The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut for there will be no night there.

The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The river flowing out to water the whole earth flowing down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life bearing twelve crops of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will serve Him as they were meant to do from the beginning in spirit and in truth.

[39 : 35] They will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever.

My mom used to say a home is not a home until you've touched every corner. You know that flat in Chicago on the day I was moving our stuff out and cleaning it to come over here to hand the keys back to our landlady.

I was still finding hair. As much as Chicago felt like home it never quite felt like home enough.

The day is coming though says the Lord that I will remake my home take up my residence once more among my people.

I will transform them he says by the power of my word plant them for eternity on my holy hill and forever they will abide as trophies of my grace.

[40 : 53] He says the day is coming when I will replant Eden and I will have touched every corner cleaned every crack every crevice every nook every cranny overcome all brokenness and separation and death and shame by the death and resurrection of my son Jesus Christ and it will never be uprooted never never be uprooted again.

Eden is not so much a picture of paradise lost as it is a picture of paradise regained. It's a picture of hope it's a picture of our God who's in the business of planting and replanting and who will plant again.

This is my hope this is my God it's my prayer that it would be your hope and your God as well.

Would you pray with me?

Amen. Amen. Dear God it is a wonder to us that you would even wait around to replant Eden especially after we've so thoroughly ruined it but let it be so for your glory and for our good and may you do it even now in our hearts in the hearts of those around us as we look to Jesus as our hope it's in his name we pray Amen.

Would you stand we'll sing again from Psalm 139 the last of David's creation psalms we'll sing to the tune eventide we'll sing verses 5 to 12 it's on page 182 Psalm 139 verses 5 to 12v read Jesus Thank you.

[43 : 40] Thank you.

Thank you.

And if I settle far beyond the sea, there also you will guide me with your hand.

And still your right hand will keep hold of me. Thank you.

The Lord God will give us light on that day.

[46 : 17] May that light dawn on your life even now. May you see the present world through the lens of Scripture.

And may you walk in its light this week and forevermore. Amen.