

Genesis 2:4-25
What is God's plan for the human race?
Notes from a Sermon preached at
Christ Church Liverpool
February 2004

My wife Gaynor wanted a pony. At the age of 8 there was nothing she wanted more than her very own horse to ride round the fields and lanes near her home on the Wirral. Gaynor's parents, wise people that they are, told her that she could have a pony when she was 16. And, inevitably, by the time she got to be 16, Gaynor realised that having a horse meant getting up every day to clean it out, ride it and generally devote all her time and money to looking after it. She never did have a pony – though she's still campaigning for guinea pigs!

Gaynor's reason for wanting to grow up was quite specific – the acquisition of a smelly 4 legged beast that gets you from A to B much slower than a car.

But it is, I think, a universal human experience that as children we spend a lot of our time wanting to grow up.

Which is strange, because often once people hit 18 they spend much of the rest of their life looking back with nostalgia to when they were children and spending their money on DVDs of the children's programmes of their youth.

So why is it that we're so keen to grow up?

Well I guess it's complex. But it seems to me that at least part of the reason we are keen to grow up is that we cherish the idea of being independent.

When I'm old enough, we think, I'll be able to have my own house, choose my own car, decorate my own room, get up and go to bed when I like and generally live entirely independently.

But of course, as we get older, we discover that life isn't that simple. Because we have to live where we can get a job. And we have to get up to go to work. And we have to consult our wives and husbands over what colour to decorate our room.

So we dream some more dreams. We dream of winning the lottery so that we don't have to go to work. Then... we will be independent.

If you wanted one word to try and summarise the goal of most people living in the western world I think "independence" is a pretty good one.

Freedom from obligations, responsibilities and requirements. We desire freedom, as the song put it, to do whatever I want, whenever I like, anytime at all.

And so, despite the fact that the tone and feel of the passage we've had read to us earlier, is one of joy and gladness, this is a section of the Bible which, properly understood, should be profoundly disturbing to our society.

Because, as one writer put it,

"I know of no other idea that is more offensive to Western men and women than... to realise that we are created by God and hence are both owned by and dependent on him for everything."

This is a truth that strikes at the very heart of all our illusions of independence and self-importance. This is the truth of Genesis 2.

God's plan for the human race is that we might be dependent on him.

That's made clear from the very first mention of the man in this passage. Formed from the dust of the ground the man lives, the man breathes, only because God himself breathes his life into his creation.

If you were here a couple of weeks ago you'll remember how God created all the living creatures. But only of the man is it said that God breathes life into him. I don't think that's to show us that we are different from the other animals – though the author Genesis certainly does think we are different from the other animals.

I think it's because he wants us to be utterly clear that we are just as dependent on God for the breath of life as any other creature in God's world. Without God's creative, life bringing act, we would just be a bunch of dust.

In fact even the word for man here – Adam – is related to the Hebrew word for ground. The man is a man of dust.

We are dependent on God. Created by him for a purpose...

1 Created to enjoy God's garden (4-15)

Eden is a word which stirs up powerful feelings.

Even in a culture like ours, where most people know very little of the Bible, the idea of Eden still conjures up, for most people, a paradise vision.

A few years ago the Millennium Commission funded the Eden project in Cornwall, an attempt

to bring together an astonishing number of plant species under enormous plastic roofs.

And I guess for most of us the image that the word "Eden" brings to mind is something like that: tropical, rainforestry kind of place.

Well if we look carefully at Genesis 2 we'll see that Eden is, in fact, much more than a nice tropical jungle.

In fact, Eden, it seems, is a range of mountains or hills. From there flows a river which waters the garden that God has made for humankind to live in.

Eden isn't just a garden. It's a region. Watered by God's provision. And its waters flow in all directions, to the four corners of the earth, bringing life and blessing as they go.

And in this region is the garden. Not a little backyard. Not even a large suburban garden. If anything this is most like a country estate. There is land for the man to work on. There are trees, which are not only beautiful but also produce exquisite food.

Everything human beings need – food, shelter, water, beauty was found in the garden that God made for the man to live in. There is order, there is plenty, there is perfection. But most of all, of course, there is God.

There is a very strong sense in these verses of the presence of God in the garden. In the next chapter the writer of Genesis uses the image of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

Of course God is present everywhere in his universe. But he is especially present here. If you want another way of putting that, Eden is a temple-garden. Temples in the ancient world were thought to be places where the gods had their presence. Well here is the true temple – a garden where the real God, the living God, the creator of the universe himself dwells with his people.

Now of course we no longer live in that garden. Because of our rejection of the God who created us we are exiles from Eden. The fact that, even when Genesis was written thousands of years ago, it was impossible to locate a precise physical spot where Eden may once have been is a message to us that there is no way back there. The consequence of our ridiculous quest for independence from God is that we no longer dwell with him in his garden.

But we still live in God's world.

And, despite the fact that it is now fallen, it still bears traces of Eden. Sometimes achingly beautiful. Providing abundantly the resources we need for life. And that should remind us of our dependence on God.

But sadly in the Western world in particular we have now grown so good at exploiting the world's resources – though not, of course in a sustainable way – that we are prone to forget that the world is fruitful because God makes it so.

We are not secure from famine, earthquake, flood and fire even though, thankfully, we live in a part of a world where those things are relatively rare.

We were created for God's garden.

We remain dependent creatures in God's world.

2 Created to rule God's world (19-20)

Because dependency is a such negative concept in our culture it's important for us to understand that being dependent on God in his world doesn't make humankind invalids.

We are not like aristocratic Victorian ladies reclining on couches waiting for God to bring us another cup of strengthening camomile tea.

The man was created a dependent with responsibility. That's one of the things that his naming of the animals in v19-20 is designed to show us.

The man could never have made those animals. He was utterly dependent on God for their creation. Even our bravest godless scientists can only produce copies of what God has made in their clumsy cloning experiments. The man could not create the animals. But he is responsible for governing them. Giving them names is a sign of his authority.

But the man's authority is not his own. It flows from the fact that God has appointed the man as ruler over those aspects of God's kingdom.

And though we no longer live in the garden still human beings are created to rule God's world.

That is why Christians should have a high view of their environmental and social responsibilities. We are stewards. Those looking after something on behalf of its owner.

To use another metaphor that Jesus himself used we are tenants, occupying the earth, caring for

and maintaining it on behalf of the ultimate landlord.

Being dependent on God is not something wet and feeble. It brings awesome responsibilities to humankind.

From the beginning of creation, work, care and rule were the responsibilities of the man God had made.

We were created to enjoy God's garden and we were created to rule his world.

3 Created to enjoy God's companion (18-25)

But even with all the wonderful blessings of the garden available to the man, God was still not satisfied.

V18. It is not good, God says, for the man to be alone.

It's clear from v18 that God has already decided what he is going to do.

So why bring all the animals to Adam first?

Well, as we've seen, one of the reasons is to show us that Adam's job is to rule the world that God has made.

But another reason for this "animal parade" is to make the man realise for himself that none of them is a suitable helper for him.

God waits until Adam is prepared and ready to appreciate his greatest gift – the gift of woman. Eve, as she will be called, is a suitable helper for Adam. People often misunderstand those words as somehow suggesting that she was an appropriate domestic help for him.

Not so at all. "Suitable" is literally "like opposite". The woman is like the man – but she is not the same as the man. Not a clone. But another part. Not an ideitikit copy, but a complementary partner.

And neither should we take the fact that the woman is a "helper" as somehow a bit of an insult. That's just a reflection on how low a value we place on helping people in our culture! Out of the 19 times the word "helper" is used in the Old Testament 16 times it refers to.... God.

Being a helper is not a reflection of the insignificance of a person. It is a reflection on the supreme importance of their task.

This woman, made from Adam's side to be equal with him, from under his arm to be protected by him and from near his heart to be loved by him is presented to Adam by God. "He brought her to the man." God is the ultimate Father of the Bride. He provides Adam with the perfect companion that he needs to stop being alone.

And in that wonderful gift of the first marriage God provides Adam, and us, with a picture of God's relationship with himself, in the trinity. More than one and yet perfectly united.

And he provides us with a picture of the relationship that humankind should enjoy with their creator. An image that Jesus himself picks up when he describes himself as the bridegroom and all those who follow him, his church, as his bride.

Of course today, in our fallen world, no human relationship, not even the best and closest of marriages, is what Adam and Eve's perfect marriage was at creation.

But the narrator of Genesis makes it clear that still this blessing of marriage exists to be enjoyed:

V24. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh."

The existence of marriage, family, and indeed of all human relationships which flow from this first relationship, should remind us of our dependence on God.

Tragically many of us use family, or our nice neat couple to try and create independence. Sadly the gift often does not remind us of the giver.

For it is God who created marriage, and family and friendship. He is the one who provided a suitable helper for Adam.

Adam's song in v23 is a song of praise to God for his goodness and his blessing. Man was created to enjoy God's companion.

4 Created to obey God's word (16-17)

Those of you who work in education or who have done summer camps – or who go into town on a Saturday afternoon shopping – will know that there are some children who just don't seem to understand the idea of restriction. They spend pretty much their whole live doing exactly what they want with no boundaries at all. And all sorts of educationalists and professionals recognise that such children are usually profoundly unhappy.

Because however much children may moan when told “no” the sense of security, care and well being that comes from parents, teachers and other who set boundaries of protection and safety round a child is huge.

What most of these professionals sadly don't realise is that exactly the same is true for adults.

In the garden God gave his people freedom and restriction.

They could eat from any of the trees in the garden, beautiful, with perfect fruit to eat, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Sometimes people act as if God put that tree there like a deliberate temptation to catch Adam and Eve out – like a huge big “wet paint” sign for them to reach out and touch the paint just to see.

But that is not true at all. That there is a tree from whose fruit they are not to eat is a blessing. It is a reminder of who they are – that they are people and that God is God.

To know good and evil is not to be able to distinguish right from wrong – the man and woman can already do that. Or God's command would be meaningless.

The knowledge of good and evil is the right to define what is good and what is evil. To decide what is right and what is wrong. And that is God's job. God, our creator, alone can define for us what is right and wrong. He is the only one who knows enough to make that choice.

The tree stands in the garden as a reminder to the man of God's goodness and provision in choosing and supplying what is right and best.

And God warns the man. If he takes to himself that which rightly belongs only to God the man will bring on himself the end of the life that God has so graciously and richly provided. *V17 "When you eat of it you will surely die."*

Obeying what God said was not a tiresome restriction on the freedom of Adam and Eve. It was the essence of life. To obey God's word was to recognise who he was and to find their satisfaction in who they were in relationship with God.

So what about us?
Do we recognise this morning that we too are God's dependent creatures?

That we are living in his world.

That we are responsible to rule the world under God

Are we reminded constantly of God's good provision in our human relationships and especially in the gift of marriage?

Do we see that we are created to obey God's word?

Are we clear that we find our place in the universe only in relationship with the God who made us?

You see whatever we may think. However self sufficient we may feel. However competent we are. Independence is a lie. A self-delusion.

If we think that being born in a wealthy country, having some money in the bank, food in the cupboard or a degree makes us independent we are fooling ourselves.

If we think, as so many do, including many who call themselves Christians, that we will find great freedom in ignoring what God says in his word to the people he has made, we are stupid.

We are dependent on God for everything. As the apostle Paul put it: he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

So however long you may have been putting it off now is the time to acknowledge your dependence on God. Today is the day to acknowledge before God that you live in his world and need to obey and believe his word.

Unlike Adam and Eve at this point, of course, we have already rebelled against God. We already live in a world that is under God's judgment for that rejection. So as well as being dependent on God for life and breath and all the material things in the world around us we are dependent on God for forgiveness.

We are dependent on God to take the initiative to enable us once more to come into his very presence.

And, wonderfully, God has made provision for that in sending his son Jesus Christ as we were singing about earlier. Putting your trust in Jesus is the right way to express your dependence on God this morning. What is God's plan for the human race?

That we live in right relationship with him. That we obey his word, acknowledging him as the giver of all good things and trusting his provision in Jesus Christ.