

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2025**

**Scriptures: Genesis 2.4b–9, 15–end, Revelation 4; Luke 8.22–25**

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### **Choose the right tree!**

One day, in the Garden of Eden, Eve turned and looked at Adam, and said, “Adam, do you desire me and me only?”

Panicking, Adam gave the only reply that he could, and which men have used ever since: “Of course darling, **who else** could there be?” 😊

Well, Eden was indeed a great place to be. It sounds like the ancient near east, like a place where dew settles on the ground in the morning, and irrigation channels are built to lead water through garden areas. The palaces of the ancient world had gardens like the Eden described: places that were harmonious, where humans felt safe, where wild nature had been tamed and controlled.

We are told God had made this heaven and earth, that the cosmos and all in it is the work of God. And into that world he makes **a human, out of the earth**. Indeed, the Hebrew for Adam is "human", or "male", and is linked to the word Adamah, which means "ground".

In Hebrew, people are clearly linked to **soil and dust!**

And yet **God breathed life** into this dust creature. God gave something that animated the soil – his **Spirit came in and gave us life**.

This is so important! We humans are both soil, dust and dirt, and divine spirit-energy. We are hybrids: made by God, powered by God, but also fallible and weak.

### **Jesus, the fulfilment of human!**

Indeed, if you think to who Jesus is, is this not something similar? Jesus was made of human flesh, born of a woman, physically capable of dying when treated wrong, yet full of God!

Indeed, the NT tells us Jesus is **the fulfilment of humanity**, the perfect person who **did not disobey** the command of God. Jesus became the new Adam, the new human, everything that Adam was called to be and failed to be.

Think of Jesus on the boat on Lake Galilee: the wild natural world comes but he calms it, for it is just his own creation, and he is the perfect man exercising true power over his world, showing what real harmony is and what it is like being at one with the world! And the disciples ask “Who is this, that even wind and wave obeys him?”. **Well, this is the perfect Adam! This is what you could have been!**

Jesus is making the chaotic natural world more like the Eden paradise again. Returning it to the place where God walked with people, where heaven and earth meet. **God made heaven**

**and earth, and there is no separation in Eden.** It is idyllic, the place we have always longed to go back to, the paradise all our culture refers to and longs for.

Did you know that, in the NT, when the thief dies on the cross, Jesus says “today you will be with me in paradise?” It is most likely a reference to a return to Eden. I had a Russian Bible that also makes a clear link – the word for **heaven** and **Eden** used is the word **paradise!**

And in Revelation, we have that glimpse of the glory of God: something that is **way beyond what humans can properly describe**, but it is truly phenomenal to be in the presence of God...something we lost but to which Jesus is the door to bringing us back.

So Eden is a garden, like that middle eastern garden of safety, where the people could rest at the end of the day, where beauty and creation sit happily together.

My great aunt is a gardener, and I’ve noticed something. Wild spaces are amazing, but they can get overgrown and not be so pretty. But it seems to me that, with the guidance of a good gardener, spaces can really flourish and bloom. **A good gardener can actually increase diversity and help nature, not hinder it. This is the role of humans in this garden paradise.**

### Key moment 1: choice

And two trees are there: **Life** and **Knowledge of Good and Evil**, which is the knowledge of wisdom. A tree that gives life, and a tree that has wisdom, but which also gives death.

There are thus **two ways: one is life. Eat of that tree.**

**The other is death.** It is a tree of knowledge, but it leads to death. Because God is the source of wisdom, God is the embodiment of wisdom, and we should not seek wisdom except from God.

And God gives the two choices: choose my way, and you get life. But there is the other way. **He gives us freedom, he gives us the choice.**

### Key moment 2: male and female

And we also have **another key event**: the introduction of **women!** God clearly looked at man and thought “I can do better! And this poor creature is hopeless on his own”.

But this is a key point: it’s not good to be alone, hence the institution of **marriage**: that is why a man leaves his family and unites with a woman to form a new family. And this process of marriage brings benefits: there is a **wealth of evidence that children raised by two parents achieve better outcomes!** And marriage is **better for society**: it provides security, it promotes behaviour that strengthens all social roots. It changes habits and ways we act. In fact, there is evidence to show that men who marry actually live longer than single men...though marriage doesn’t have the same effect on wives!

Singleness though is not anything lesser: **being alone and isolated is the problem**. We need other people and community for our mental health; we need support and encouragement; and physically need help from others, especially when we are ill.

But the key point of Genesis is that **marriage is good and men and women need each other**. The man is sedated, part of him is removed and woman is made. Eve as we call her is connected with the Hebrew meaning “**source of life**”.

And Adam says “She is made of me”. She is soil and dust, but also filled with God’s Spirit. **She has the same blessings and uniqueness that I have, and that Jesus fulfilled**.

**There is nothing in Genesis, other than man coming first, to suggest hierarchy**. Elsewhere, it says woman is a “helper” for man, but the word is “**equal helper**”, not servant. Women and men – while different – are made for our roles and given our gifts for the benefit of each other.

Imagine a world with only men: it would have crisp packets, pizza boxes, beer cans and dirty clothing everywhere. Imagine a world with only women: it would have bows on cars, boxes to contain boxes which hold other boxes, and wasted resources because “it looks cute!” We do need each other, but that is a source of tension – learning to live with the other is difficult, but **when we both humbly say “I need help”, we both grow!**

### Summary

So we have an idyllic world in Genesis, but we also have the **seeds of trouble**.

**There are two trees: so the option of choosing the wrong one is always present.**

**There are men and women**, for each other’s benefit, **but the differences have the potential for strife**. Now, men will have to share and learn to help women; and women will have to deal with forgetful men who leave piles of washing up and presume it will wash itself!

So where do we land?

Men and women were made for each other’s benefit. We need each other, but we also **learn from each other and our differences**.

Marriage is for **our benefit, and for wider benefit, the benefit of society**. We must challenge our culture which says “shop around”. Our calling is to show loyalty, humility and grow together.

But we have the **two ways always before us**: Life, choosing to trust God; or the tree that looks good, promises a lot, but delivers death.

That is the choice we face all the time, and especially in relations between men and women: do we choose humility and service, following the harder way of commitment?

Or do we choose instant gratification and what suits me now, and my own power and control at the expense of my partner?

Let us thank God that Jesus has become the perfect human and opened the door back to the paradise of Eden.

And let us **choose** that Tree of **Life, following God's way**, for that is the way that truly leads us back to that glorious garden, that awesome throne room, and the restoration of harmony – especially between the sexes – that we so long for.