Another Day In Paradise — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 2:4–17 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, February 5, 2023 · *In The Beginning*

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They did a great job, do a great job as always. If you have your Bible, you can open it to Genesis chapter two. And we've been working our way through Genesis over the last several weeks and turning the corner into Genesis two and excited about what is in store for us this morning through God's word as we continue through this great narrative of creation. We entitled the series *Genesis: In the Beginning*, but really another fitting title would have been the word foundations because all the foundational questions of life get raised and answered in Genesis 1, 2, and 3.

Questions like, what is this, and what is man, what is woman, what is marriage, what is wrong, how do we fix it? Those kinds of things are raised and answered in Genesis one to three and this morning we're looking at the idea of paradise, and I think you don't have to be a Christian to acknowledge that paradise as a concept it's pretty easy to think about. We all have some kind of definition of paradise. And what is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word paradise, besides the Phil Vassar song, or whoever the guy was that sang "Just Another Day in Paradise."

That's the first thing that comes to my mind. But besides that silly song, when you think of what is it, like, "Okay, if I could create utopia, here's what would be there." We probably all have a different definition on the particulars of what utopia would look like. This is what politicians use. They use our desire for paradise to kind of promise us things. But we all have a basic idea that such a thing exists and where does that come from? Well, you don't have to be a Christian to believe this.

It comes from the fact that there used to be a thing called paradise, and we don't have it anymore. Whatever paradise is I think everybody can agree this ain't it. Can we say amen to that? This ain't it. This is not paradise. And we know that deep down, not only do we know that paradise exists, we know deep down this ain't it. So paradise was given somewhere,

somewhere along the way, and it has been lost, and we're trying to recover this thing that got lost. And that's really what Genesis 2 is all about: how and when paradise was given, what it looked like, how it was lost and how we can discover it again in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And C. S. Lewis popularized an argument for God's existence based along these lines when he said that if we find within ourselves a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most likely explanation is that we were in fact made for a different world. And so if we all have this yearning for paradise, but we can't ever seem to satisfy that yearning by anything in this world, then it may be that points to the fact that that yearning can only be satisfied by someone out of this world, that someone being God Himself, and that paradise being what we experience through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so what I'm going to do this morning is give us a working definition of paradise from Genesis 2: paradise is when God's people in God's place fulfill God's purpose under God's protection. I think that's a pretty good summary of what we're going to see in Genesis 2: that God has a people that he has made special. He has a special relationship with these people. Those people are put within a place. In Genesis 2, it's the garden of Eden. It's the garden of paradise. They're not just put there to enjoy the garden, but they're put there to do something, and that something is to fulfill God's purpose, which in a word is to work it and keep it.

And then finally, God gives them a command, a layer of protection. He says, "You can do all of these things, just don't do this thing. And if you'll not do this one thing, then you will remain under my protection in paradise." And so with that in mind, let's read, starting in chapter 2, verse 4, a little summary statement really of the whole chapter, where he says that "these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."

Now this is just real quick Bible nerd. I think this is interesting. Some of you won't care. But this word *generations* is actually where we get our title to the book of Genesis. The word Genesis is actually a Greek word, even though the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. They couldn't read Hebrew back in the first century, at least a lot of people could, so they wrote a version of the Old Testament in Greek called the Septuagint. And the transliteration of this word here, *generations*, is the Greek word *genesis*, and that's how we got the title to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

I don't know what the original Hebrew title was, so I'm going to have to look that up on Google, but don't DM me later. This word though is important. The reason the book of Genesis is called Genesis is because this word *genesis* shows up some twelve, thirteen times in the book of Genesis to make major divisions in the book. It shows up here in chapter 2, verse 4. It shows up in chapter 5, verse 1; chapter 6, verse 9; chapter 10, verse 1; chapter 11,

verse 10; verse 27; on and on we could go, twelve, thirteen, fourteen different times that these sections of Genesis are kind of bookended by this phrase *generations*.

And this is the telling of the generation of all of creation. Everything up there in the heavens, everything down here on the earth. And notice the poetic structure, again nerding out here a little bit, but this is what's called a chiasm where you have two things that are similar. The first and the last are similar. The second and the second to last are similar. And then right here in the middle, you have similarity, except difference. In Hebrew poetry, you would say the same thing but two different ways. And so he says created right here, and then he says made right here.

But that's the emphasis, that in this creative generation and this account of creation the most important thing to know is that God is the one who created it. He created the heavens, He created the earth. They were created and made by God alone. That's the core truth of Genesis 1. That's the core truth of Genesis 2. But what's going to happen in Genesis 2 is that Moses, the author, is going to zoom in on God's creation of mankind and that he made mankind something special and for a special kind of relationship.

He puts that against the backdrop of this uncompleted creation in verse 5, when he says that there was "no bush of the field" "in the land," there was "no small plant of the field" that "had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground," and there "was" a "mist going up from the land and" it "was watering the whole face of the" earth. So incomplete creation, kind of chaos, disorder. And then verse 7, God—"the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

So the first thing I want us to see about paradise is paradise is for God's people. And you see the phrase *God's people* not show up at all in this verse. And usually when you hear the word God's people, you maybe think Moses or Abraham or covenant people. That's not the way Genesis is appealing to it. He's saying that in the Garden of Eden, God made a special kind of man, that his creation of man was for a special kind of purpose. And that special relationship is alluded to in like three or four different kinds of ways.

And again, it's against the backdrop of this chaos and disorder. He says there's no bush, there's no rain, there's no plants. No man. Kind of sounds like West Texas to be honest, but think the whole entire world was like West Texas, except for that watery mist all over the place. There's no lakes in West Texas, unless you count the sewer lake over there, but basically all of that incomplete creation is the reason why God creates mankind. He creates mankind in essence to kind of join him in his work of taking all that chaos and bringing it into order.

Now if you're a student and you kind of closely analyze Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, you can probably see just from a quick reading something doesn't fit, right? You got days one, two, three, four, five, and six in Genesis one, and they're kind of a chronological order and certain things happening on certain days, and then you read Genesis two and you see it's all jacked up. You've got mankind created while the earth is still desolate, and, "Well, I thought the desolate earth was in day two and mankind was on day six."

And people get really tripped up about this. And I think the reason you get tripped up is you're trying to read Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as two different creation accounts, and that's not what they are. Genesis 1 is a creation account, and Genesis 2 is him zooming in the lens of the camera on the creation of mankind and he's really zooming in on the theological reasons why God is creating man, that he's actually using man and he's forming a special relationship with man so that he can join God in taking all that chaos and bringing it into order and that lack of cultivation in the earth and cultivating it so that it becomes a paradise in which they can dwell.

Now that I think is alluded to three different ways in this chapter, Genesis 2. Number one, it's the use of God's covenant name. In Genesis 1, I don't know if you notice this, but it uses the word Elohim over and over and over again. But it's not until Genesis 2 that you see the words Yahweh Elohim. And in your translation, it's going to say Lord in all capital letters, L-O-R-D. That's the word Yahweh. So it's not just God in general, but it's the covenant God. It's the Yahweh. It's the great I am.

That's the one way it's talking about the special relationship. And the other two ways is the verbs that are being used. In Genesis 2, we see the verb *formed* and the verb *breathed*. And neither one of those two verbs are used anywhere else in Genesis 1 or Genesis 2 to refer to anything else in the creation other than the creation of mankind. And so if you just go to that next verse, Genesis 2:7, I think you can see all three of these things all at once. You see here the word Lord God, so that's the covenant name of God, Yahweh.

So he's appealing kind of forward because Moses also wrote Exodus and Numbers and Deuteronomy. He's saying, "The Lord that delivered us from Egypt, the Lord that freed us from slavery to Pharaoh, the Lord who gave us the promised land, that Lord is the Lord God who created the first man and the first woman." That covenant-keeping God started that covenant-keeping relationship with us all the way back in Eden. And then the words formed and breathed, this word formed is not used of any other element in creation. A lot of times it uses the word *bara*, which just means create or God spoke and it was.

But only here with mankind does God form him. And elsewhere this word formed is used to talk about a potter and clay. So think of a potter taking that quick-spinning little piece of clay and he's using his hands and he's caressing it and he's forming it and there's precision and nuance and delicate care given. That's the kind of attitude that God takes with the creation of

mankind. Unlike the other animals. Now it's not to say that other animals are not complex, but human beings are way more complex in certain respects than any other animal in creation.

You just take the human eye, for example. The irreducible complexity of the human eye is unbelievable. Are any of you nurses or doctors or pre-med students? Anybody? Okay, a couple of us. Yeah. Vast majority of us are not, but a couple of us are there, got that good education. Anyone who's done something like that can tell you the just unbelievable, awesome complexity of the human body. We can say like the psalmist says, "I praise you, Lord," for "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." That's this word. He formed us. And then the word breathed.

And not just breathes, but he breathes into man's nostrils. I don't know if you've ever had anyone breathe in your nostrils before, but I can promise you. I don't care how close we are, I don't care how good a friend you are, you're not coming close to my nostrils. The only person who would ever come—I don't even think I'd let my own children touch my nostrils, especially my youngest with all the snot coming out of his nostrils, but no one's getting close to my nostrils except the person who's the very closest to me, and only then if she paid me a lot of money.

That kind of intimacy is as close as it gets. And that's what's being described between God and mankind. The way I think about it is if you've ever had a child and you're putting your child to bed or you're taking them down for a nap and you know how babies have that magical power to make you fall asleep too. And so you're falling asleep, your baby's falling asleep, and then you kind of come to and you're just staring there looking at your baby and then your baby wakes up and he's looking into your eyes and you're looking into his eyes or him or her or whatever.

And that moment of—you don't even need words to communicate it, but this intense affection: "I would do anything for you. I would go to the ends of the earth to protect you. You have no idea how much you mean to me." That kind of intimacy is what Genesis 2 is describing between God and man. We were made by God, yes, from the dust, yes, we are creatures, no doubt, but we are special creatures because God formed us and he kissed us like he breathed His breath into our nostrils. We were not just made by him, but we were made for him, to be in communion with him.

And that's what it means to be God's people. And we're not just created by him, but we're loved by him, we're pursued by him, we're treasured by him, and we should treasure him back as well. So God's people are put in God's place. That's the second pillar in verses 8 to 14. Paradise is not just that we're given the gift of God's life, paradise is also that we're given the gift of God's presence. And I honestly didn't see a lot of this in Genesis until studying it this past week, but there's so many things about the description of Genesis that show up later on

in the Old Testament that point to the reality of paradise being not just the boundary line of the garden, but the presence of God in that place.

And so it says in verse 8 that "the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man" that "he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." And "a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and" it "became four rivers." Then he talks about the four rivers.

"The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold," and that "gold" "is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there" as well. And then "the name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria," and the name of "the fourth river is the Euphrates." Now those four rivers, we don't know where two of them are today.

We obviously know the Tigris and the Euphrates. Interestingly, one of the members of our church in the last service was telling me about how in Africa there is this sanctuary called the Gihon Sanctuary, and that's interesting how some of the geographical allusions there in Cush can correlate to that. But we don't know for sure where these other rivers were. But the important point is that there's one river in Eden. It's flowing out of God's little throne or God's presence there in paradise, and then it's breaking off into these four branches and it's filling the earth with that power and life-giving nourishment of God's presence.

And so the rivers are an important symbol. The other important symbols are the wood from the trees. The gold is mentioned. You saw mention of bdellium and onyx stone. Those are also used later on in the Old Testament. The fact that it's east of Eden, this eastern gate, is important later on in the New Testament, and whether it's the eastern door or the gold or the onyx or the trees or the fruit—all of those things, guess where they show back up in the Old Testament? They all show back up in God's instructions to David and Solomon on the temple.

And when they're constructing the temple, I would advise you to go back and read this in the Old Testament, look in the book of 1 Kings, and I think it's the book of 1 Kings.[1] When you see the temple created, you see these pillars of wood, and engraved on the wood are trees and fruit. You see in the Holy of Holies that the most holy place is overlaid in gold. You see on the breastplate of the high priest onyx stone and bdellium and some of these precious stones that are in Genesis two.

You see the menorah in the temple, which is representative of the tree of life, that has the seven flames[2] that go on and on and on. So what's happening as God instructs his people on

how to build the temple is he's putting things intentionally in the temple to throw back to Genesis 2 and say, "What I'm trying to give you in the temple is what was lost in the garden, which was my presence, it was my power, it was my life, it was that intimacy and communion and oneness that you had with me in the garden that was then lost because of Adam's sin. I'm giving you that again in the temple."

And it's not just the description of the garden. If you look at the rivers, all throughout the Old Testament the rivers communicate God's life-giving presence. Psalm 46, one of the most famous Psalms: "There is a river" in Zion "whose streams make glad the city of God." This river is a throwback to the river in Genesis chapter 2. It's the same river that the righteous man in Psalm 1 stands next to. He's like a tree planted by streams of water, who bears his fruit in season and out of season, whether it's a drought or a winter or good sunny weather, he's bearing fruit nonetheless, no matter what the external world looks like, because he's planted by streams of water.

You see the same thing in Ezekiel chapter 47, except this time the river is not in the city. Now the river is in the sanctuary. It says "on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither"—just like Psalm 1—"they will bear" fruit, "fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the"—interesting —"sanctuary." Just like the elements in the garden point to the temple sanctuary in the Old Testament, now the rivers of the city, Psalm 46,[3] the rivers of the new city, Revelation 22, are the same rivers that flow from the sanctuary in Ezekiel 47.

All of that's pointing to the future of the new Eden, the new paradise, Revelation 22. We just did this as a church. We walked through Revelation. Do you guys remember Revelation 22, verses 1 and 2? John sees the angel—skip past Psalm 1:3 and go to Revelation 22. He sees the angel, "the angel" shows him "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God"—there's the sanctuary language—"and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city"—there's Psalm 46 language—"also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

That's language from Ezekiel. So he's synthesizing all of this language about rivers in the Old Testament and saying all of those rivers of God's presence and God's healing and God's fullness—that was in paradise. That was the original plan of God, that we would enjoy his presence, that we would be nourished by his life, and we would never die. And that's what the tree of life represents. The tree of life was a reminder that in God's paradise there is no fear of death. Not that they were literally unable to die. It's kind of the vibe I get is that as long as they ate from the tree of life their mortality would never suffer death.

They would live on and on and on, and any ailment, anything messed up or broken would be healed by the fruit of the tree of life. And all of—like I said earlier, the menorah, which shows

up in the Old Testament temple later on, was pointing to that eternal life of God's presence, whether it's in the garden or whether it's in the temple. The rivers that I mentioned in Revelation 22 and Ezekiel 47. These are the same rivers that Jesus mentions in the Gospels. You remember Jesus comes on the scene. Of course, Adam and Eve have sinned.

They've lost paradise, and Jesus is talking about a new kingdom where paradise is restored. And how do we experience that paradise once again? Jesus says in John 7, it's by grace and it's through faith and it's in me. He says, "Anyone who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" "This he said about the Spirit, whom those who" had "believed in him were to receive." And so what is the place? The place is not just—Eden is not just a geographical region in the earth that is a physical garden planted by God.

It is at least that. It's at least a river, it's at least the trees, it's at least all of that. But those things point to something greater. And that greater thing is the presence of God, the healing of God, the nourishment of being in God's presence. And that's what the rivers point to, and that's what the tree points to. A reminder that in paradise there is no fear of death, and communion with God and oneness with God will be experienced forever and ever and ever. So the rivers point to the life-giving power and nourishment of God's presence.

And then if you're taking notes very quickly, the tree of life is a reminder that in paradise there is no fear of death. Fear of death was not meant to be a thing. So that's God's people put in God's place. Just very quickly before we finish out, we're also created for God's purpose in this place. It wasn't enough for God to just make a special people and put them in paradise. He also gave them a unique assignment. And that unique assignment is in chapter 2, verse 15, where he says that "the Lord God took the man and" he "put him in the garden of Eden to work it and" to "keep it."

Two words, work it and keep it. God's purpose for man in paradise is that he might do those things. And I'm not going to do a deep dive on the word studies, work it and keep it. They're pretty self-explanatory. He wants us to cultivate creation, just like we saw in Genesis 1. Have dominion over it, cultivate it, bring the potential out of the created world. And then the word keep it, or it's kind of like the word *guarding*: make sure you separate the profane from the holy. Make sure you keep it in alignment with what God's original design is and fascinating to me as I was studying this week, these two words, work it and keep it, they show up throughout the Old Testament.

But the only other time they're used together is in the book of Numbers, describing the priest in the temple. So fascinating that the garden again is pointing to the temple. Adam isn't just a gardener, he's a priest. And in the Old Testament temple, the priests were to keep guard over the temple and over the whole congregation as they minister—that's the Hebrew word for work—at the tabernacle. "They shall guard" or keep "all the furnishings of the tent of

meeting, and keep" or "guard over the people of Israel as they" work or "minister at the tabernacle."

And so again, this idea of work is so much more than just physical labor. What God is getting at in Genesis 2, paradise for mankind is when we take our gifts and our talents and our abilities, and we begin to see them as a stewardship before a holy God, to make the most of every opportunity and take our time and talent and treasures and the things in front of us and cultivate them for the glory of God and maximize their potential for the glory of God and our enjoyment in him.

And in that way, all of us work. Some of us work a nine to five job, some of us work in ministry. Some of us work as a stay-at-home mom, making a home and raising children. Work is not just vocational secular work. In Genesis 2, work is anything that you do to take your unique talents and abilities and gifts and leverage them to cultivate the created world for God's glory. And you can do that at home as a mama, you can do that as a business owner in the, you know, in the general economy.

The point is that you just begin to see your work a little differently than other people see your work. If you want work to be a paradise again, then you've got to change your thinking about work, what work is really about. You've got to begin to understand work is actually a blessing. Work was given to us before the fall. It's before sin. It's before the curse. Some people think when we get to heaven we won't have to work anymore. I don't think so. I think when we get to heaven we work just as hard as we worked here.

It's just not so laborious and frustrating, because we don't have those limitations and that brokenness in the created world that's gone because of the healing that Christ will bring, but we still work. Some of you who have retired, you guys probably know this. If you've ever retired and you just sat at home and you watched soap operas or Netflix or whatever the case may be, how many of you tried that for a couple of weeks and then you went crazy? And you felt like you lost something. Something that you used to have.

It wasn't just that you used to be busy doing work, it's that there was something core to what it means to be human that you lost when you stopped working. This is why a lot of people who have retired work harder now than they did when they were in their working years. I don't know how many people I hear that say that: "I'm busier now than I was when I was working." You just don't get paid any money anymore. What a rip-off. You should have just kept your job. No, I'm kidding.

You should probably have retired, but you've sensed innately deep down, "I was made for work," and that work is a blessing. But it's not just a blessing, it's an act of worship. Just like the priest, they ministered in the temple. Well, that's the word worked, and they kept guard over the temple. They made sure, let's separate the holy from the profane. Let's try to

cultivate this. Let's make it according to God's original design. I'm going to build buildings. Yes, absolutely, but I'm going to build beautiful buildings for the glory of God.

I'm going to be a lawyer. I'm going to argue cases, but I'm going to pursue the truth or I'm going to pursue justice for the glory of God. I'm going to raise children and I may not be seen as a worker in the traditional sense of the term by my culture, but I'm going to cultivate these children. I'm going to raise them in the fear and the instruction of the Lord for the glory of God as an act of worship because my work is an act of worship before the Lord.

It is a blessing from God and it is an act of worship before God. Thirdly, it is a stewardship to God. One of the things this last year, as the Lord was working in my own heart and exposing some things in my life that needed to be exposed. One of the central themes that I walked away from that season with was work as a stewardship. And that the things that you presume that will be there forever may not. That your kids are a stewardship. You know, it's temporary. And you're accountable to God for how you cultivated your children.

Your spouse is a stewardship. She may or may not be there forever, and you're accountable to God for how you cultivated the opportunity. Your church is a stewardship. You can't presume it will always be there or be what you think it's going to be. It's a stewardship, it's temporary and you're accountable. Your work, whatever it is, is a stewardship. An opportunity for you to worship the Lord, but also an opportunity for you to cultivate and maximize and bring the best potential out of that thing. And then one day stand before God in judgment and he says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You were faithful as a steward with a little bit. Now come and inherit the joy of your master."

It's a stewardship. And then lastly, it is a visible testimony. Our work is a visible testimony to God. We were created to mirror and represent the reality of God in this world. And the way that work testifies to God's glory and goodness is that we work hard as Christians. Christians should be the least lazy people. Amen. We should have the most beautiful art. We should have the best carpet cleaning business. We should have the most compelling skyscrapers and whatever the case may be because we work hard because our work is a testimony that we're not working for you, we're not working for a paycheck, we're working for the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth, and he is worthy of all glory and honor and praise.

And when we get maligned in our workplace and when people lie about us and when people slander us and we show by our response that "I don't care what you think about me. I don't even care what I think about me. I only care what God thinks about me because my work is not my God. God is my God, and I worship God through my work. And so I'm going to be more patient with my enemies. I'm going to be more forgiving of those who mistreat me. I'm going to be more patient. If I don't get the promotion, I'm not going to let it ruin my life. If I don't reach the pinnacle of my career, it's okay. I'm not living to reach the pinnacle of my career. I'm living for the Lord God."

Work is an act of worship and how you work in the workplace gives testimony to who God is in your life and in our world. That he is sufficient, his grace is sufficient, and I do what I do for his glory and enjoying his creation as the gift that he gave. And then finally, God's protection, verses 16 and 17, "the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" And so paradise is when God's people put in God's place, fulfill God's purpose, under God's protection.

Ultimately, paradise is lost because mankind does the one thing God says don't do. And I think it's fascinating. The Lord God commands the man, eat of every tree. We always focus on the prohibition, but do not forget the exhortation. "Adam, have a blast. There are so many trees out here that are so delicious and so appealing to the eye. I want you to enjoy them. I want you to run wild. There's just one tree I do not want you to eat from." And it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

I heard someone say the other day that this is great parenting advice. I tend to agree. An island of yeses—an island of no's and an ocean of yeses. That as you raise children, you don't want to be exasperating your children. No this, no that, no everything. A handful of no's to create structure and protection and say yes to as many things as you can say yes to. That's how the Lord God treats Adam in the garden. "Eat of any tree you want to eat, just this one thing. And the reason I don't want you to eat of this tree is because I know if you eat of this tree, you will surely die."

Dying, you will surely die, is literally how it's translated. And of course, he does the one thing the Lord tells him not to do. They hear the lie of the serpent: "You won't surely die. Did God really say?" And they say, "Well, you know, maybe he did it, and, you know, maybe we won't." And so they fail the test. Now some people ask the question, why did God give them a choice? It's an interesting question. I'm of the persuasion that we can't really be made in God's image if we don't have the capacity to love.

And love can't be true love unless and until it's tested. And you can't really test love unless the ability to choose also entails the ability to do the opposite. The ability to choose must entail the ability to reject. And so God tests the love of Adam and Eve for Him, the lover of their souls, the one who pursued them, made them, pottered them, all of those things. He says, "Out of my love for you, I want to protect you. Please don't do this one thing." And they take the one thing that God says don't do, and they do it, and as a result, God's warning becomes a reality, and they suffer death.

Immediate no, but inevitable yes. Not just physical death, but spiritual death and relational death. They are cut off from communion with God. They are cast out of the garden, east of Eden. They now have to work still, but now by the sweat of their brow, with frustration, because the earth itself has been cursed by the sin of man. Rejecting God results in death.

But what Adam lost through the fall, Jesus Christ gives again through his death and resurrection. Rejecting God results in death, but what Adam lost, Jesus can give again.

And we don't have time to go through all this, but if you go to the Gospels, what you see Jesus do is everything Adam didn't. Jesus perfectly obeys the Father. He lives a sinless life of love and obedience. In everything that he did, in his relationship with God, in his relationship with other people, in his relationship over creation, he perfectly stewarded his life. And having lived a sinless, perfect life of love and obedience before God the Father, Jesus willingly lays down that life on the cross. He's hanging there and he cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Not because God had forsaken him based on any sin in him, but because God was putting on him your sin and my sin and the sin of Adam and the sin of all of the world was channeled, and his wrath, God's wrath poured out on Jesus. So that his perfect life could be credited to us and our sinful unrighteousness could be credited to him. He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God. So that we might regain and recover the paradise that we lost.

And you know that Jesus can give it back because as he's hanging on the cross, he's got a criminal on his left and a criminal on his right, and one criminal's talking trash and saying some not nice things, and the other criminal says, "Shut your mouth. You have no idea what you're saying." This is the Wes Terry paraphrase. And Jesus says to the man—I don't actually know if it's left or right—but he says to the other man, "Today you're going to be with me." Where? "In paradise. I'm going to give it back. You lost it. Obviously, you lost it. You're sitting here with me. Your sin removed you from that umbrella of God's protection, and now you're suffering the consequences of your sin, which is death. But I want you to know, even in this moment, even though you're undeserving, by my grace, through your faith, I will give you paradise again. And today you're going to be with me."

And so everything that paradise is, becoming God's people, how do we become God's people? It's by repenting of sin and putting our faith in Jesus as Lord, and we are reconciled to God. We are brought into God's family, how do we get in God's place? How do we rediscover God's presence? How are we brought back into communion with Him? It's not by effort, it's not through works of the flesh, it's not by the law of God, it's by repentance of sin and putting your faith in Jesus Christ. He puts you in the place of paradise again.

He puts you in the garden. Yes, it's a foretaste, not the full thing that doesn't happen until Jesus comes again, but it's paradise nonetheless. And even though the world is difficult and there's trials and tribulations and you may be at the lowest point of your life, you're just a second away from closing your eyes and experiencing rich, satisfying communion with God through Jesus Christ. And that paradise, that oneness, that communion enables you to

persevere and endure through even the lowest of valleys. Because you're with me and your rod and your staff they comfort me and you prepare a table before me.

Even in the presence of my enemies, you're preparing that table and you're sitting with me and dining with me and communing with me and that is what sustains me until you come again and establish a new heavens and a new earth. We are God's people, put in God's place, fulfilling God's purpose, under God's protection by repenting of sin and putting our faith in Jesus as Lord. And you may be here this morning and you're not a Christian and there's never been a time in your life when you've done that, when you've made Jesus Lord of your life, and this morning the Holy Spirit may be calling you to that place of unity and communion and paradise.

And if you've never made that decision, I would encourage you to come and respond to the Lord. If you don't want to, you know, come down in front of everybody, there'll be a QR code that you can scan. The rest of us though, the vast majority of us this morning have probably not been availing ourselves to the paradise that is ours in Jesus. You don't have a quiet time, you don't read the scripture, you never pray. God feels distant and detached and it's a needless infliction that you've put on yourself.

He is there. He is available and willing to sit with you and commune with you. As he says in the book of Revelation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if you'll just open the door, and if you'll just let me in, then I will sit with you and I will commune with you," and you can taste paradise that we lost because of sin. We can have it again through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so if you're anything like me, sometimes you know it up here.

But you haven't been practicing it here. And this morning, as the Holy Spirit moves in your heart, it's an invitation for you to sit at the table once again with the Lord and have your heart encouraged and strengthened and renewed, knowing it's not anything that I do, it's what Jesus has already done for me. And I want to come back to that place of rest and intimacy and communion with my Maker God. And if I can pray with you or pray for you in that regard, I'll be happy to do that.

But just right there where you're seated, you can respond to the Lord. And make that decision. So let's bow our heads together and pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time and for your word. We thank you that we can be people who even though we don't deserve paradise and even though our sin has caused us to lose it by your grace, you can give it back. There may be some of us here this morning, Lord, who feel like I'll never get back what I lost. Some things are just too far gone and I pray that you would restore in them a vision of hope and a vision of your power to redeem and restore what the enemy has taken.

For the couples who are on the brink of calling it quits or the single person who's on the brink of saying it's not worth waiting, it's not worth doing it God's way. I pray you would give us a compelling picture of paradise and that it is worth the wait. It is worth whatever it takes to pursue it with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So would you do that in us now by your Holy Spirit as we receive and respond to your word and we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "look in the book of Numbers, and I think it's the book of Numbers"; the building of Solomon's temple, with its carved palm trees and open flowers and the inner sanctuary overlaid with gold, is described in 1 Kings 6 (see 6:18, 20, 29, 32). Source: 1 Kings 6 (ESV), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "the twelve flames"; the lampstand (menorah), made with cups like almond blossoms, had seven lamps. Source: Exodus 25:31–37 (ESV), BibleGateway. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "Psalm 47"; the river "whose streams make glad the city of God" is Psalm 46:4. Source: Psalm 46:4 (ESV), BibleGateway. ↩