

North Summit Church
Genesis 1:26–28; 2:8–15
September 20, 2026

The Mission Before the Fall: Priests in the Garden

INTRODUCTION

We're continuing our journey through *In the Beginning*: the "Prologue" of the Bible that gives us the "deep grammar" of who God is, who we are, why we exist, and what went wrong. Genesis 1–11.

- **Week 1** – God alone is uncreated and sovereign. He spoke a very good world into order with no rival and no struggle, and the week ends in Sabbath rest.
- **Week 2** – Humanity is the crown of creation. Every human being bears God's image as his royal representative, and that one truth reorders how we see life, marriage, and our own bodies.
- Last week I ended on an idea that I have been pointing to over the past two weeks. I want to pick it up in full this morning.
- **What is our vocation as God's Image-bearers?**
- The answer the Bible gives us is found in Genesis 2:15 in the form of the first job description in Scripture. Before the fall, before the curse, God gave humanity a vocation that is both Priestly and Kingly.
- Most Christians carry an assumption that work, family, and culture-building are what we do on top of "real" ministry. But, Genesis says the mission came first. God gave humanity a purpose in the opening pages.
- **Here is the big idea for today:**

Before sin ever entered the world, God gave humanity a mission. Fill the earth with his image, and keep it as holy ground.

The mission of God did not begin as damage control.

- **We'll look at it in three steps:** the mandate, the sanctuary, and the mission recovered in Christ. Then I want to speak into four places this mission is meant to be lived: your home, your work, your community, and your civil responsibility.

READ: Genesis 1:26–28; 2:8–15. Again, I want to challenge you to spend time in these verses this week.

1. Blessed, Then Sent: The Royal Mandate (1:26–28)

Genesis 1:27–28

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Blessing Before Assignment

- Look at the order. "God blessed them. And God said to them." The commission comes with God's blessing. Before humanity is told to do anything, God gives them His blessing, He gives them everything they need to accomplish this task.
- We saw the same pattern in Week 1. Everything starts with what God has given, and only then with what we are asked to do. The mandate is God's grace with a job attached.

Two Royal Verbs

- *Kabash*, "subdue." It means to bring under control, to make usable. Elsewhere it describes land brought under Israel's hand (Numbers 32:22; Joshua 18:1).
 - Notice what Genesis 1 does not give us: an enemy. The world is very good. It is also unfinished. Six days of forming and filling have just happened, and the assignment is to keep building.
- *Radah*, "have dominion." A king's verb (1 Kings 4:24; Psalm 72:8). Ancient kings could rule like shepherds or like wolves, and Ezekiel 34:4 indicts the wolves for ruling with force and harshness.
 - The image tells us which kind of king we are meant to be. We rule the way the One whose image we carry rules. (representation, not autonomy)

Culture Building Was Never a Consequence of Sin

- Fill the earth. Subdue it. Rule it. Nobody fills an earth by standing still. This is a mandate to build: farms, families, cities, music, medicine, law.
- The word we use for the result is *culture*, from the Latin for cultivation. Farming and culture are one word for a reason.
- Many Christians quietly treat culture-making as something fallen people do to fill a void, and treat the church's real job as staying clean of it. **Genesis 1 won't let us.**
 - **Culture-building is in the original assignment, spoken over a world God had just called very good.**
- And this task goes to "them," male and female. There is no professional class of image-bearers. Nobody is exempt, and nobody is only a spectator.

- **Our culture**, unfortunately, flinches at the word dominion, and it's not without reason. It has watched fallen kings use it. The answer is not to drop the assignment. The answer is to rule like the King whose image we carry.
- Two ditches sit on either side of this road. One is exploiting what we were given. The other is retreating from it and calling that retreat holiness or piety. Genesis 1 rejects both.

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2. A Job Description in Temple Language: Work It and Keep It (2:8–15)

Genesis 2:15

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it."

Two Hebrew Verbs

- **Abad**: "to work, to serve." **Shamar**: "to keep, to guard, to watch over."
- The noun from *abad* is *avodah*, and here is where English fails us. **Hebrew uses that one word for a day's labor and for worship.** It's the word for Israel's slave labor in Egypt (Exodus 1:14) and for Israel serving God at his mountain (Exodus 3:12). We split "job" and "worship" into two categories. Hebrew doesn't even have a category for the separation.
 - In God's economy there isn't sacred life and secular life. All of life is a vocation of worship, because the end result in all of it is the Glory of God. This is where we get our mission statement as a church.
- The same verb shows up in 2:5 ("there was no man to work the ground") and again in 3:23, and it means soil and sweat. The priestly reading does not turn farming into something else. It tells us what farming was for.

Another place these two verbs appear together:

Numbers 3:7–8

"They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle."

- The ESV smooths this into "guard" and "minister," but underneath are the same two Hebrew verbs, *shamar* and *abad*. You find the pair again in Numbers 8:26 and 18:5–6. Every time, it is the Levites, serving in the sanctuary and guarding it.

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One more thing to point out:

Genesis 3:8

"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden."

Leviticus 26:11–12

"I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people."

- God walks in the garden. It is the same verb form God uses when he promises to dwell in the midst of Israel. "Dwelling" in Leviticus 26:11 is built on the word for tabernacle. Where does God walk among his people? In his sanctuary.

Genesis 2:10–12

"A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became 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 the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there."

- Gold and onyx are not botanical details. Gold covered the furniture of the tabernacle, and two onyx stones engraved with the names of the tribes sat on the high priest's shoulders (Exodus 28:9).
- Cherubim stand at the eastern approach to Eden (3:24). The tabernacle's entrance faced east, and cherubim were woven into its veil and stood over the ark (Exodus 25:18–20; 26:31). Guards at the door of the sanctuary in both places.
- Centuries later, Ezekiel calls Eden "the garden of God" and "the holy mountain of God." That is sanctuary vocabulary. The prophets read Eden the same way we are reading it.

Ezekiel 28:13–14

"You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked."

- So Adam was not a gardener who happened to worship on the side. He was a priest whose sanctuary happened to have dirt in it.

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Priestly and Kingly Vocation

- Chapter 1 gave us royal verbs: rule, subdue. Chapter 2 gives us priestly verbs: serve, guard. Same vocation. Revelation and 1 Peter will hold the same pair together when they call us a kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood.

- *That is the image of God again. Toward creation, we are to be kingly. Toward God, priestly. Representing the one to the other.*

Guard Against What?

- *Shamar* assumes a threat. You don't post a guard over something nobody could take. Genesis 2 doesn't name the danger. Genesis 3 will, and we meet him next week.
- For now, notice that the job description assumes a real sanctuary with real boundaries: holy ground worth guarding.

Eden Was Meant to Grow

- Put the two verses side by side. Genesis 1:28 says fill the earth. Genesis 2:15 says work and guard a sanctuary. But the garden is one planted corner, "in the east" (2:8), and the earth is enormous.
- The natural reading is that the sanctuary was meant to spread. Image-bearers, multiplying outward, carrying God's presence with them, until the whole earth is what the garden was.
- Watch what the prophecy in Habakkuk says about where human history is headed.

Habakkuk 2:14

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

- That is the vocation we have been invited into as God's Image Bearers

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3. The Priest Who Failed and the Priest Who Didn't (3:23–24; Matthew 28; Revelation 21–22)

Genesis 3:23–24

"Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."

Same Verbs, Different Ground

- Listen to how Genesis describes the loss. It uses the vocabulary of the job. Adam is sent out "to work the ground," *abad* again, now on the outside of the sanctuary. And the guarding passes to the cherubim: *shamar*, "to guard the way." The priest is on the wrong side of the door.
- We'll take two full weeks on how that happened and what God did about it. Today's point is to remind us that the mission was interrupted, not cancelled.

The Job Gets Handed On

Exodus 19:5–6

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

- At Sinai, God restates Adam's assignment to a whole nation: stand between me and the peoples of the earth. Israel fails the way Adam failed. The priesthood narrows to a tribe, then to a family, then to one man, once a year, behind a veil. The job keeps shrinking because the people keep failing it.

Then Comes the Second Adam

Romans 5:19

"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

- Where Adam failed to guard, Christ kept faith. Where Adam was driven out, Christ opens the way in. He is the true image (Colossians 1:15), the great high priest (Hebrews 4:14), and the King. Listen to what he says on the mountain.

Matthew 28:18–20

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

- Hear the echoes. "All authority" is dominion, restored in the last Adam. "All nations" is fill the earth. "I am with you always" is God walking with his people again. The Great Commission is the original plan, repaired.
- Watch how Luke tells the story of the early church.

Acts 6:7

"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

- "Increase" and "multiplied" are the two Greek verbs the Greek Old Testament uses for "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28. Luke narrates the church's growth in the language of the mandate. And notice the last clause: priests of the old order joining the new priesthood.
- Here is what this does not say. The Great Commission does not cancel the cultural mandate. Christ is not asking the church to abandon farms, families, and cities for a purely spiritual task. The filling now runs through new-creation people, working in every kind of work.

A Kingdom of Priests, Now

Revelation 1:5–6

"And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of

kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

- Present tense. He has made us a kingdom, priests. You are a priest today, before you have done a single priestly thing. You are one because of the High Priest, not because of your performance.
- Peter says the same to scattered believers with no temple in sight (1 Peter 2:9). The priesthood does not need a building. The church gathers as a priestly people on Sunday and scatters as one on Monday.

Where It Is Going

Revelation 22:1–5

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; 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. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

- Look at what came back. The river. The tree of life. The way open. "His servants will worship him" uses the Greek word for priestly service, *latreuō*. And "they will reign." Priests and kings, at last, in the same sentence.
- John measures the city as a perfect cube (Revelation 21:16), the shape of the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 6:20), and then tells us there is no temple building in it (21:22). The whole city is the sanctuary. Eden did not stay a garden. It became the world.
- **We are working inside a kingdom that is already arriving.**

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Application: Priests in Every Sphere

Here is what I believe this passage is calling us to:

There is a term for what we are about to do. The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper called it sphere sovereignty. God gave the family, the church, the state, and the marketplace each its own authority and its own job, and none of them gets its authority from the others. Kuyper's famous line is that there is not a square inch of our existence over which Christ does not cry, "Mine!" Genesis is where that begins. The priestly calling is not one more sphere. It is the calling you carry into all of them.

1. Receive the Calling Before You Chase the Job

- You are a priest because of the High Priest. Revelation 1 says "has made us," not "will make you if you do well."

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

- "Spiritual worship" is *latreia*, from the same family as the word in Revelation 22. Your Monday through Saturday is not the warm-up for worship. It is part of the liturgy.
- Ask yourself, honestly: if someone watched your week, would they guess you thought you were a priest?
- You will be an inconsistent one. Adam was a failed one, and God answered with a Priest who did not fail. That is why we gather every week. Priests get fed and equipped before they get sent.

2. Fill and Guard Your Home

- The household is the first place the mandate lands. Marriage is the first institution (2:24, last week), and the family is where "be fruitful and multiply" gets its primary fulfillment.
- Fruitfulness is bigger than birth. It is raising image-bearers who know the King, in a house where his Word is on the table (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).
- A priest at home has two jobs, the same two as in the garden. Fill: the table, the Word, the songs, the honest conversations, the open door for the neighbor. Guard: what walks through your door. Screens, feeds, and marketing are shaping the people you are responsible for whether you decide anything or not. You don't have to be paranoid. You do have to be awake.
- If you are single, widowed, or without children, you are not outside this. Fruitfulness runs through discipleship, hospitality, and the people you spiritually father and mother. The church is a household too.

3. Do Your Work as Priestly Service

Colossians 3:23–24

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

- *Avodah* again: work and worship, one word. In Exodus 31, God fills a man named Bezalel with his Spirit for a very specific job. He is to design and build the tabernacle's furnishings in gold, stone, and wood. One of the first people Scripture says God filled with his Spirit is a craftsman.
- So the welder, the nurse, the teacher, the accountant, the mother, the retiree. None of you is waiting for the real ministry to start. This is it.
- The thorns are real. Work is frustrating now, and we will spend Week 5 of this series digging into why. Frustration doesn't prove your work is meaningless. It proves we are living east of Eden.

- Bring three questions to work.
 - **Who am I serving? What am I guarding? What am I building?**
 - Serving means the person on the other side of the counter, the desk, or the bed, "as for the Lord." Guarding means your integrity, the person nobody else is looking out for. Building means doing it well, as an offering.
- This week, before you start your first task, say it out loud. "This is for the Lord."

4. Build Culture That Points Beyond Your Own Name

Jeremiah 29:4–7

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

- Listen to that as people in exile in Babylon. Plant gardens. Fill households. Multiply. The mandate of Genesis 1 survives exile. God tells his people to build inside the city that isn't theirs, and to pray for it.
- Seeking the welfare of Sandpoint looks like schools, small businesses, the arts, volunteer boards, and neighbors who show up. Nobody has to hold an office to do this.

Revelation 21:24–26

"By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations."

- The city is not empty of human making. I won't press how much of the fruit of our work comes through those gates. I will press that the nations carry something in, and that what is true, good, and beautiful has a future.
- Two ditches again. Retreat builds a holy huddle and forgets "fill the earth." Domination turns the faith into a political machine and forgets that the church's authority is the Word and the Table, not the sword. Christ rules the world through a people who serve, not through a church that runs everything.
- Later in this series we will meet people who build a city, and then a tower, to make a name for themselves. Test what you build against that. Whose name is on it?

5. Come to the Table to Be Sent

- Priests ate at the sanctuary. Their food came from the altar (1 Corinthians 9:13). That is why we gather at the Lord's Table every week and do not treat it as an add-on. You are not asked to carry the mission on your own strength. You are fed by Christ, by his Spirit, at his table, and then you are sent.

- Fill the earth. Guard the ground. Do it as priests, fed by the Priest who did not fail.

Numbers 6:24–26

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

The word for "keep" there is *shamar*. The God who assigned us to guard is the God who guards.

Benediction Prayer

Father, before there was a thorn or a tear, you blessed us and gave us work. You put us in a garden to serve it and guard it, and you walked with us there.

Forgive us for the times we have treated our homes, our work, and our city as somewhere to wait out the time until the real thing begins.

Thank you for the Priest who did not fail, who opened the way we could not open, and who has made us a kingdom of priests even now. Feed us by your Spirit. Send us into our homes, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, as people who belong to you.

And hasten the day when the river runs through the city and your servants see your face.

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Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Blessed, Then Sent

Genesis 1:28 arrives as a blessing before it is a command, and it was spoken over a world God had just called very good. Culture-building, work, and family are part of the original assignment, not a reaction to sin.

Which of those three (work, family, or shaping the culture around you) do you tend to treat as merely tolerated rather than assigned by God? What would change if you saw it as part of your original calling?

2. Work It and Keep It

The Hebrew *avodah* covers both labor and worship, and *abad* and *shamar* appear together in Genesis 2:15 and again for the Levites in the tabernacle.

Where do you split "job" from "worship" in your own week? What would it look like this week to do one specific task as service to the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:23)?

3. The Priest Who Did Not Fail

Adam was driven out of the sanctuary he was meant to guard. Christ opened the way back and has made his people a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:5–6).

Where do you feel like a priest in name only? How does it change your response to failure that your priesthood rests on his faithfulness and not yours?

4. Priests in Every Sphere

We looked at four places the calling lands: home, work, city, and the public square.
Guarding the garden means knowing the facts, telling the truth, and loving the people
God has put in your care.

Which of the four spheres are you most likely to treat as outside your calling, and what is one concrete act of filling or guarding you could take there this month?