Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Our passage describes a garden with trees in it. And as we try and understand what this garden passage is all about, we don’t want to make the mistake that is captured in the saying: ‘**He can’t see the forest for the trees**.’ Have you heard that saying before? It is used when a person gets so stuck on the details that they lose sight of the bigger picture. And it is very easy to do. Well, there are many interesting and important details in this passage. And we are going to get into them today. But we don’t want to lose sight of the forest, because chapter 2 is very much a big-picture-of-the-Bible chapter. It introduces some of the grand and important themes of the Bible. And we began to see this last week as we considered the relationship between chapter 2 and chapter 1. But the grand themes of our passage today are **temple** and **covenant**. Chapter 1 gave us the man and the woman as the ‘God-like kings’ who would rule in God’s newly created kingdom. And **chapter 2 explains the covenant relationship that God and man will live in in the garden temple**. And we will unpack that together as we continue through the sermon, but understanding temple and covenant will really help us with our reading and studying of the whole the Bible.

So, coming back to that ‘trees’ and ‘forest’ saying that I mentioned earlier, we will start with the ‘**trees**’ – the details of this passage, and then we will stand back and look at the ‘**forest**’ – how this passage describes and introduces covenant.

1. So, first of all, let’s look at the ‘**trees’** – the ***details*** in verses 5-17.
   1. In verse 5 we read: “*When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up*.” Then we read about how God made the man and planted a garden where He put the man. And then the Lord made trees to spring up. And it is because of this section that **many Bible commentators say that chapter 2 disagrees with chapter 1; that it is a second creation account**. And of course, in their mind, this gives them justification to not take chapter 1 literally. And the apparent disagreement that they latch on to is that chapter 1 has plants and trees created on the *third* day and man on the *sixth* day, while chapter 2 seems to be saying that that were no bushes or plants before God made Adam. And at first read, this does seem confusing or even conflicting. So, what is chapter 2 saying? Well, as ever, we must look carefully at the text.
      1. If you look back at **chapter 1:11** and day three, what terms are used there? Vegetation, plants, and fruit trees. And now look at chapter 2:5; what is referred to there? Bushes of the field and small plants of the field. Other translations have shrubs of the field and herbs of the field. So, **something far more specific is in view** in verse 5 than the very general terms referred to back in chapter 1.
      2. And notice also **the explanation** for why these very specific plants had not yet sprung up that God offers in the rest of verse 5: “*for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground*.” And these words are crucial in understanding what is being described here.
         1. Most simply, what is happening here is this: Chapter 1 tells us that God created plants and trees **before there was rain to water them or man to cultivate them**. But for them to grow and flourish, both water and man were needed. And that is what chapter 2 is about, as God provides both.
         2. But beyond this, what existed at the end of the third day was **basic food for the animals and humans** – grass and leaves and fruit, etc. And that maybe perfectly adequate for animals, which just eat whatever there is and wherever they can find it. But that is not how it is with man. We don’t want to go far and wide to find a fruit tree or a patch of grass for our next meal; we want our meals close by in the garden we planted. And we want to experiment with different flavours and textures and spices and combinations. And we want flower arrangements. And so, while there was basic land vegetation, as per chapter 1, the types of vegetation that man will plant and eat and arrange and enjoy had not yet sprouted. And that is what chapter 2 is about: Man was needed to garden, to take the world of plants and herbs and flowers and trees to a whole new level.
         3. And I am sure if I went to each of your houses, to one degree or another, this is what I would find – gardens and pot-plants and herbs and flowers. Animals do not produce any of that, but we humans, who were created in the image of the ultimate gardener, do!
      3. So, chapter 2 does not disagree with chapter 1. It is simply telling us more about how mankind was created to be fruitful and subdue and have dominion.
      4. And congregation, **there is a whole theology of ‘gardening’ here**. And we simply do not have time to be comprehensive here, but in general terms, where you find many Christians, you will find homes with gardens and flowers and lawns, and farmers and orchardists, and cities with public gardens and tidy vegetation. That is a by-product, if you like, of people understanding the creation mandate. And contrastingly, where there is paganism, you will find fewer gardens and fewer farmers, and untidy and overgrown vegetation. And people just eat whatever food they can find somewhere for that day. And right now, in western Society, there is a growing hatred of what is called ‘colonialism.’ I heard an example of it earlier this week in the wake of the cyclone. One man blamed the flooding on farmers and orchardists. He said if New Zealand had been left covered in forest, like it was, then none of this would have happened. Now, not all farms and farmers are perfect, and we do need to think about ecological balance, but we were created to garden and farm and improve and harness and produce. That is not colonialism; that is the creation mandate!
   2. But another detail worth considering here is **the creation of man**. We read in verse 7 that the Lord formed him “*of dust from the ground and breathed into His nostrils the breath of life, and the man become a living creature*.” And later in the chapter we will see that the woman was formed from one of the man’s ribs. So, not only are male and female human beings made in the image of God, they have the breath of life in them, from God.
      1. And this is why we must **reject any suggestion that human beings evolved from other animals**. We did *not*. We were created as human beings by God. We all descend from our original parents – Adam and Eve.
      2. And this is also **why murder is so wicked**. We *are* allowed to kill animals. God said so in Genesis 9:3. It should be done as humanely as possible, and it should be for good reasons, but we are allowed to kill animals. But we may not kill human beings, because they are made in God’s image and have the breath of life in them, from Him. And this is so from the moment of conception until natural death. And this is why abortion and euthanasia are utterly wicked. And this single point decides these issues. All the other attempted justifications fall away if we see that an unborn baby or a cancer-riddled adult have the breath of life from God in them. And we are commanded not to kill them. Instead, we should do our utmost to preserve and protect human life.

* 1. But in verse 8 we read about **the garden in Eden**. And we are told that Eden was “*in the East*.” And that would be east of Israel, which is where the people for whom Moses originally wrote these words lived. And while we don’t know which rivers the Pishon and Gihon are, we see mention of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which are still there today. So, **can we know where Eden was?** No. The best we can say is that it was probably somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula.
     1. And the reason why that is all we can say is because, as we have previously noted, there was originally just one super-continent. And after the Global flood of Noah’s day, which was well before Moses wrote Genesis, the receding waters led to the separation of the continents, the forming of large mountains and canyons and valleys, which were not there before the flood. So, in the same way that many places in New Zealand are named after places in Europe, because they *kind of* look like them, the place and the rivers that Moses described here looked like the place and rivers that Adam had told his sons about and they their sons, etc.
        1. So, we are not told all this about Eden so we can book flights to the Arabian Peninsula and go on a search for Eden tour. We are told all this to see that God created a most special place for Adam and Eve to live in and garden and mine and enjoy fellowship with God in.
     2. And again, we can only scratch the surface here, but **Eden was the original temple**. Commentators call Eden ‘God’s Garden Temple.’ And we see this in that:
        1. It is where God came down to earth to walk with Adam and Eve “*in the cool of the day*,” as we see in chapter 3:8. So, **God met with His people in Eden**, just as He did in the tabernacle and temple, and just as He will do in the heavenly temple at the end of time.
        2. And the **entrance** to the garden was on the East side. We see that in chapter 3:24. Likewise, the main entrance to the Temple was on the east side.
        3. And one of the items in Israel’s temple was the **seven-branched lampstand**, shaped like a tree, to represent the tree of life, which we will say more about in a moment.
        4. And in verse 15, we see that Adam was placed in the garden to “***work it and keep it***.” And the only other places in the Old Testament that we find these same two Hebrew verbs used together is in reference to the work of the priests in the temple.
        5. And in verse 12 we see mention of **gold and bdellium and onyx**. And gold and precious stones were prominent features of how the temple was decorated. They were also present on the priest’s breastplate.
        6. And finally, **verse 10 says that “*a river*** *flows out of Eden to water the garden*.” And a large basin of water was part of the tabernacle/temple equipment. And in Ezekiel’s vision of the post-exile, rebuilt temple, he describes water flowing out from the temple in chapter 47. And in our earlier reading in Revelation 22, we read of the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God through the heavenly temple city.
        7. So, this wasn’t just a nice garden; this was the first temple on earth!
  2. So, can you see what I mean now by chapter 2 introducing us to the grand themes of the Bible? We have a garden temple in Genesis. The tabernacle and temple will be a central part of life and prophecy and promise in Old Testament Israel. Jesus will come and speak of Himself as the temple that will be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. Believers’ bodies are described as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The church is described as the temple where God dwells with His people by His Spirit. And Revelation speaks of heaven as a glorious temple city. So, wherever you are in the Bible, one thing to keep an eye on is what is going on with the temple? Where are we at in the story of the temple? How are we being pointed to Jesus and the heavenly temple? And this is why the Bible is so amazing! So obviously God-authored. This is why we learn new things in passages we may have read many times before. It is so rich and wonderful!

1. Well, I called this first point the ‘**trees’** – ***the*** ***details***. Our second point is the **forest** – the big picture – the covenant. And perhaps you have heard another saying, which is that ‘**there is an exception to every rule**.’ Have you heard that one before? Sometimes you come across a situation that does not fit into the usual rule. And today is an example of that, because the best way for us to see this covenant forest is to look at the trees! Let me explain how this is so …
   1. As per **verse 9**, God has prepared a garden full of trees! Think of the most verdant, lush, juicy looking fruit trees and vines you can imagine! Guava, Pineapple, Watermelon, passionfruit, Rock-melon, pomegranates, grapes, papaya… And the colours were magnificent. And the shade was wonderful. And the aromas and flowers are exquisite! There is goodness are as far as the eye can see. And it is all there for Adam to eat and enjoy, as we see in **verse 16**: “*You may surely eat of every tree in the garden*.” And soon Adam will be joined by the woman, and their relationship will be one of perfect bliss and harmony. And there is crystal clear water and gold and precious stones. **You would think that life could not get any better**. But it *could*! This wonderful life in Eden is not the best life that Adam and Eve can live. How do we know this? We know this because of the two trees in the middle of the garden that are described in verse 9 – the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and because while God permitted Adam to eat of every tree in the Garden, He also said, “*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*.” So, **how do these two trees and this command reveal that there was a better life beyond Eden for Adam and Eve to aspire to**?
      1. Well, first off, there is **the tree of life**. And because Adam was barred from eating of it after the Fall, and because it will be in heaven, as we read in Revelation, earlier, we can infer that to eat the fruit of this tree would be to enjoy an even better life than what Adam and Eve already enjoyed in Eden.
         1. Maybe it will help you to think of all the other trees as ‘regular feasts,’ but this tree as a ‘**sacramental feast**.’ Kind of like how we have regular meals in our homes, but we have the Lord’s Supper in church! The Lord’s Supper is a sacramental feast. And so, And the Tree of life would also have been a sacramental feast. When God eventually allowed Adma and Eve to eat of this tree, they would enter eternal life and perfect fellowship with Him.
         2. Now, we are going to engage in a little speculation here, but hopefully it is biblical and helpful. One possibility then is that **the Tree of life had not yet blossomed and born fruit; that it was not yet mature**.
            1. One commentator puts it this way:

*The tree stood in the midst of the garden, with buds preparing to burst into bloom, as a tangible reminder of the promise of the greater life held out to them if they obeyed. We're not told specifically that Adam and Eve could not or did not eat of this tree, but it would seem that eating from this tree was for later, that the fruit of this [tree] would make a [sacramental] feast for Adam and Eve to eat once they had passed the test of obedience represented in the other tree. [So] The presence of the tree of life communicated to Adam and Eve, "There is even more goodness ahead for you. If you'll trust God to take care of you by obeying His word, you will eat my fruit, and enjoy a life that is even better than the life you enjoy now."*

* + 1. But close by stood **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**. And don’t let the name trick you into thinking that all or half of this tree looked evil. For everything in the garden was “*very good*.” In fact, in chapter 3:6, we read that Eve “*saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes*.” So, you can imagine the serpent pointing from one tree to the other. Are you going to wait for that scrawny one when you can have what it promises now if you eat from this juicy, ready to eat one? Now, again, we are not explicitly told that the tree of life was immature. I am only suggesting that as a possible explanation. The main point was: Would Adam and Eve listen to God? Would they trust in His word and His promise? Would they obey Him and wait until they were allowed to eat from that tree? In other words, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of loyalty and patience.
       1. Have you ever seen those **videos of young children** being given two bits of delicious candy and being told they can eat those two now, but if they wait and do not eat it, when the adult comes back, they can have six more candies and eat it all then. And what happens? The children cannot wait, and they eat the two bits.
       2. Well, that illustrates very well the type of test that God set before Adam and Eve. Don’t eat from that tree; wait until I allow you to eat from this one. The difference though is that the consequences of not waiting were death, by which was meant *spiritual* death, *physical* death, and eternal condemnation. Would Adam and Eve believe God and wait for the tree of life, or would they disobey and die?
  1. And this, people of God, is where we come to **covenant**. And most basically, a covenant is a binding agreement between two parties. And even though we don’t read the word covenant in the passage, all the elements of covenant are here.
     1. The first one is **the name by which God is referred to in chapters 2 and 3**.
        1. Can any of you tell us God’s special covenant name in the Bible? Yahweh. It is always translated as LORD, in capital letters, throughout the Bible. Well, from chapter 1 all the way through 2:3, the name of God is “God” – Elohim – the plural God of majesty. But beginning at chapter 2:4 and all the way through to the end of chapter 3 it is “**Lord God**” – Yahweh Elohim. *Twenty* times He is referred to that way. It is Covenant God and Plural God of majesty all rolled into one name. And the only other time He will be referred to that way in the first five books of the Bible is Exodus 9:30, which also has covenant overtones. So, clearly, this is a most important part of the Bible.
     2. So, turn with me now to p.109/903 in the forms and confessions books. There you will find Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7.
        1. **Article 1** says, “The distance between God and the creature is so great that, even though rational creatures are responsible to obey Him as their Creator, yet they could never experience any enjoyment of Him as their blessing and reward except by way of some voluntary condescension on His part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.”
           1. So, God, if you like, comes down to our level, and makes an agreement that we can understand. And that is what a covenant is. And that is exactly what God does in verse 16. And He will do it many other times in the Bible also.
     3. But this first covenant we call the **covenant of works**. **Article 2** says, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works in which life was promised to Adam and, in him, to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”
        1. And that’s what we have just been talking about. If Adam had obeyed God and not eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he and all his posterity would eventually have been allowed to eat from the tree of life and enter into the most perfect bliss of eternal life.
  2. Now, we made the point last week that **the cross of Christ was not God’s plan B**. We must not think that Plan A was the Garden of Eden and the covenant of works, but because Adam and Eve ruined that plan, God had to come up with a plan B – the cross. No, it was always the design and intention of God that Christ would come and redeem some of fallen humanity. The way to eternal life was always meant to be faith in Jesus Christ. Ok. So, chapter 2 is how we get to chapter 3. And we will learn about *the covenant of grace* when we get to chapter 3. We will learn that just as we inherit sin and death and condemnation from Adam as our covenant head, so we can inherit eternal life if we will receive and believe in Jesus Christ as our covenant head.
  3. But as we draw to a close, I want us to see that the gospel of salvation in Christ is already present in chapter 2. And to see this we have to say a few more words about trees and gardens.
     1. You see, congregation, it is no coincidence that the Bible describes **the cross of Christ** as a tree. **1 Peter 2:24**: “*[Jesus] bore our sins in His body on the tree*.” So, think of the cross of Jesus as His tree.
     2. And just as Adam and Eve were tempted in relation to their tree while in a **garden**, so the Lord Jesus was tempted in relation to His tree while in a garden – the garden of Gethsemane.
        1. But while Adam and Eve’s garden was bright and sunny, and they had all their needs and desires met, Jesus’ garden was a dark place of abandonment and betrayal and hatred.
        2. And there was nothing juicy and delicious about the tree in front of Jesus. There was only pain and anguish and spiritual horrors beyond description.
        3. And we know from the prayers of Jesus in the garden that He did not want to eat of *that* tree if there was any other way. But we know also that it was the fruit of this tree that His Father required Him to eat.
        4. And Jesus also had to trust His Father’s promise of benefits and blessings and rewards that would come on the other side of His tree. And Jesus *wholeheartedly* submitted Himself to His Father’s will.
        5. And so, as Nancy Guthrie puts it in her wonderful book, called ‘*Even Better Than Eden*,’ “On that day, human sin, which began at a tree in Eden, was dealt with at another tree, the cross of Calvary.”
        6. And congregation, here is what you must understand about that tree: **You deserve to hang on that tree**. Like Adam and Eve, your sins are so many and so wicked, that you deserve the wrath of God. But as He hung on that tree, Christ endured the full penalty of your sin, so that you may enjoy eternal life!
        7. Nancy Guthrie puts it this way: “This tree of judgment has become to us a tree of life. Oh, how we bless that cursed tree! When we come under this tree and take hold of its fruit, it changes everything about the story of our lives.”
        8. And so, I ask you today, have you taken hold of the fruit of Calvary’s tree? Have you recognized that you deserve eternal condemnation and trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?
        9. And I ask you that because faith in Christ is the only way that you will get to eat of the tree of life that is described in Revelation. **Revelation 2:7**: “*To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*.” **Revelation 22:14**: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates*.” And **Revelation 22:2** says, “*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*.”

Do you want to enjoy the fruit of that tree? I do! And do you see now how we are introduced to the salvation story of the tree of Jesus Christ and the tree of heaven story of the trees and the garden in Genesis 2? It is the best story ever! It is the truth! It is meaning and purpose and hope and joy! Amen?