creation, Incarnation, humanity, stewardship, leadership, work, ministry

Gen 2:15
As God’s image-bearers, humans are to grow and guard His creation.

INTRODUCTION:
–To preface this talk, I said, “God made us in His image on purpose for us to live with purpose,” and also, “Who we are is inseparably interwoven with what we do.” Our text is Gen 2:15 (HCSB). The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. As God’s image-bearers, humans are to grow and guard His creation.

[We struck out in the 1st inning. Then God joined humanity by Incarnation. Now, it’s a whole new ball game. Jesus is leading the Team, we’re up to bat again, and Heaven is cheering us on to hit home runs.]

–In my preface, I also gave the meaning of “placed” [lit., “to cause to rest”]. God has “placed” us in a garden gathering to rest, relax & recreate! We might think that last word means: to do fun things instead of work. But it has 3 other meanings: 1) to reanimate, repair, renovate, revive, or restore energy; 2) to cheer, embolden or encourage; 3) to reestablish or create anew. These last 3 define what we need for getting back to work. God wants to re-create or restore who we are and what we do. Our personal identity and work come from God, and He wants to fill them both of them with new life: His life.

–My approach to this theme will follow the questions I asked last night:

I. “Why did God create us as body-spirit beings in the first place?”
A. This cosmos is our home! God made us from stardust, calling the world of matter “good” and our material bodies “very good.”

B. Heaven is also home—when God “breathed” spiritual life into the 1st Adam, He was starting a race of body-spirit creatures with both animal and angelic natures: we’re a physical and spiritual combo.

C. God made us in His image for a special purpose: to represent Him.
1. Our job was twofold: 1) to populate creation with His “image” and “likeness,” and 2) to “have dominion” or to “rule over” creation.

2. We began with just “the garden”, but the career of Christ as the 2nd Adam shows that this human government was intended to be both cosmic and celestial (over “a new heaven and a new earth”).
As body-spirit beings, we were meant to participate in both worlds and be mediators between them. As God’s image-bearers, we were to “rule over” those worlds. At the very outset, the 1st Adam failed in this representative role, but when God’s Son became the 2nd Adam, He redeemed us and reestablished us in this representative role of growing and guarding His creation. But let’s explore this further.

II. “How does the Incarnation define our calling in a fallen world?”
A. Sin disrupted creation, but we are still body-spirit embodiments of God’s image. (Our original incarnation was the basis of Christ’s Incarnation, and His Incarnation restored the impact of ours.)
   1. Sin damaged, but didn’t eliminate our incarnational abilities: mind still worked with matter [Gen 4:19-22 lists tent-building, skill with musical instruments, animal husbandry, mining and metallurgy, tool-making]. (Civilization’s advancement and cultural development are a direct result of humanity’s incarnational nature.)
   2. When God became one of us, He chose a carpenter’s family and worked most of His life with mind and muscle in construction. (He knows His business, when He says, “I will build my Church...”)
B. As the 2nd Adam, God’s Son became the Prophet, Priest and King of a new human race, not only fixing original humanity’s failure, but calling us to join Him. (His “Follow Me!” invites us to serve in these prophetic, priestly and kingly roles that He restored.)
   1. On earth, Jesus spoke prophetically for God. (Now it’s our job.)
   2. His priestly work on the Cross calls to us: “Take up your cross!”
   3. And as King with “all authority in heaven and earth,” He tells us, “Go!”

Our destiny isn’t to get past “the pearly gates”, but to move into the throne room. Salvation is God’s remedial plan to restore His fallen human project. We see no church services or prayer meetings in Gen 1-2. God had us improving and protecting His work, naming life forms, and procreating more humans for the gigantic, challenging job of governing creation. Getting saved and sanctified and spiritually edified aren’t ends in themselves but the conditions necessary for getting us back on the job in our Creator’s workforce. So, now....

III. “What material and spiritual tasks make up Christian ecology?”
A. Gen 2:15 helps answer this—The LORD God took the man and placed him in His creation which groans as it longs for Resurrection Day. Let me close with a portion of my poem [“EARTH’S GROANING”...]

Listen gently, friend or foe
Of the God-Man, Christ the Savior.
Feel Earth’s groaning down below,
Under humankind’s behavior.

Listen, hear all Nature’s plea
For the sons of men to follow,

Sing boldly, brothers and sisters, no matter where “in the garden” God has placed you.
3. **Col 3:17.** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (For servant-friends of Jesus, all ground is holy; all work is sacred.)

B. Also, we need to discover and **renew our ties with creation** [Loren Wilkinson: “...reconciliation between persons and their Creator is incomplete if it does not include a reconciliation with the creation from which they are estranged?] (**Body acceptance is a good start in repairing the very first human estrangement with creation** [body shame]. What displays our bond with naked creation more visibly than birthday suits?)

C. To live out our calling to **care for creation**, we must 1) stay aware of the prophetic, priestly and kingly purposes for which God placed humanity in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it, and 2) always remember that people and relationships are also part of creation.

1. **As prophetic voices,** we must speak God’s will and ways into our work environments. (Planting godly principles in ungodly places often requires the wise counsel and ongoing prayers of a small group ministry. If you aren’t in one, **pray today to find one**.)

2. **As priestly ambassadors,** we must be aware that our presence brings Jesus the Healer and Reconciler to every person and into every situation. (Because Jesus indwells our bodies, they are His holy temples: our visit becomes His visit; our touch is His touch.)

3. **As leaders and protectors,** we must become skilled and bold in using our King’s authority against spiritual darkness.
   a. We must **see beyond the visible**—**Eph 6:12 (ISV)**. For our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm.
   b. We must **use every means of grace** available to gain victory for God’s Kingdom—**2 Cor 10:4-5 (NIV)**. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (Tomorrow we will have Holy Communion, and I have found that the Lord’s Table is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual warfare at our disposal.)

CONCLUSION:

–God’s image-bearers must **grow and guard** His creation. Creation’s eye is on us—**Rom 8:19**. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. God calls us, as co-creating friends, to serve and guard in the garden of Eden **to work it and watch over it.**

1. **Satan still exploits** the body-spirit schizophrenia he got started in human self-understanding (“**Who** told you that you were naked?”).
   a. He leads some into **materialism**: “Matter is all that matters.” (“**Use it up while you can!** Who dies with the most toys wins!”)
   b. He leads others into **Gnosticism**: “Spirit is all there is.” (“**To be holy, you must beat the flesh and despise all things physical.”)

2. But “the Maker of heaven and earth,” has one will for both realms: (“**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**”) Our fleshly embodiment is **strategic** for His plan in managing creation! In our body-spirit natures, we’re to be His servant-leaders over all things.

B. I addressed this call to **tend and guard** in a poem [DIVINE ECOLOGY]

The creation longs for freedom
From a bondage not her own,
For the creatures in God’s image
Brought the curse that makes her groan.
We, the race meant to attend her
And to govern her with care,
Have abused and plundered nature,
Adding grief to her despair.

But the LORD so loved the cosmos,
With His handiwork arrayed,
To bear the image He had made,
To purchase restoration
For the heavens and the earth.

But the LORD so loved the cosmos,
With His handiwork arrayed,
To bear the image He had made,
To purchase restoration
For the heavens and the earth.

But the LORD so loved the cosmos,
With His handiwork arrayed,
To bear the image He had made,
To purchase restoration
For the heavens and the earth.

Both to lead His image-bearers
Back to safety, by rebirth,
And to purchase restoration
For the heavens and the earth.

For our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (Tomorrow we will have Holy Communion, and I have found that the Lord’s Table is one of the most powerful tools for spiritual warfare at our disposal.)

C. Before looking at the 1st word describing our job of **caring for the garden**, I want to focus on the 2nd one: “to **watch over.**”

1. [**šāmar** means to keep safe, take care of, keep your eyes on, watch diligently, guard, protect, preserve, defend.] It implies some threat in “the garden.”
   a. **Physically** (in terms of modern ecology), this **danger** might be a **misure** rather than a **preservation** of the natural environment.
   b. **Spiritually** (in terms of the context), it means there was an **evil being** was loose in creation and that a **spiritually dangerous tree** was in the garden. Creation needed **protection** from both.

2. What does this “**guardianship**” terminology imply for us today?
   a. In our **physical** work on earth, we’re to be carefully involved observers, not unconcerned passers-by; protectors of all God brings under our care, not slackers; preservers, not wasters.
b. **Spiritually**, we must protect against spiritual evil where God “has placed” us, and keep what’s forbidden safe from misuse.

**TRANS:** As body-spirit beings, we guard in two realms. On an earthly level, we should be doing good ecology better than non-Christians who have only an earthly motivation for being good at it. In heavenly terms, we should be skilled in spiritual warfare. As God’s image-bearers, we represent Him bodily through our ecological watch-care over creation, and spiritually by using His authority over evil worldly forces. That’s what this 2nd term in caring for the garden is about. **Now, the 1st one:**

### IV. “How is being servants of God shaped by our privilege of being co-creating ‘friends’ of the Creator?”

#### A. God finished creation, then assigned us the task of cultivating it.

1. [This word, **ābad**, means to work on or serve things, people, or God. When it’s serving God, it implies “joyful liberation” not “toilsome labor.”]

2. **Desiring** “to work” is natural to humans (Think of toddlers who love tinkering with real tools rather than toys; hobbies that people work at harder than at their jobs; “out-of-work” adults or retirees getting depressed unless they’re serving as volunteers or doing something useful, something helpful).]

3. **The modern stigma** of work as “toilsome labor” is turned around by Christ—*Col 3:23-24*. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, so you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

#### B. To “work” with creation as a service to God—in all the ways this term **ābad** implies—is a divine privilege entrusted to humans.

1. It’s far from a mechanical or hierarchal concept of service—*John 15:15*. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you **friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (With our incarnation (still responds to us, as God’s image-bearers. It does so favorably or unfavorably, depending on the degree to which we do or don’t embody God’s will:

a. This is a **huge** subject in Scripture, encompassing everything from Abel’s blood crying out from the ground to Jesus talking to a fig tree or telling a sea-storm, “Peace, be still.”

b. There are also reports of strange phenomena, like plants and water responding to human emotions and moral actions:

1. [Cleve Backster, a CIA “lie detector” expert, claims that a lie detector attached to plants recorded this kind of responsiveness, even including memory. In one experiment, a plant responded violently when a man ripped apart a nearby plant. Later, when other men walked in the room, nothing registered. But when the man who had killed the neighboring plant entered the room, the recorded plant reacted violently.]

2. [Japanese researcher, **Masaru Emoto** claims that, when frozen, water previously exposed to words, pictures, music, or moral actions, either formed lovely crystals or formless masses, depending on the good or bad nature of what it was exposed to. He believes this shows that water connects all of life and that its responsiveness is a means by which good thoughts can effect our bodies and shape our lives and environment.]

3. **Scientific materialists** call these experiments “fairy tales,” just as they do the Scriptures that support such evidence—**Prov 18:20-21** (ISV). The positive words that a man speaks fill his stomach; he will be satisfied with what his lips produce. The power of the tongue is life and death—those who love to talk will eat what it produces.

**TRANS:** Our words matter, because we’re the King’s prophets. Our views and attitudes matter, because we’re the King’s priests. Our work matters, because we’re the King’s friends. Religion tries to serve a God of law, who is transcendent or distant. But we serve a God of love. He is imminent or close, and even became one of us by Incarnation. What does collaborative, human-friendly, co-creating service with this loving God look like? **This invites our last question:**

### V. “What does the task of ‘caring for the Garden’ have to do with our many different kinds of work in the secular world?”

A. First, we need to rid ourselves from the idea of any work being “secular” (“BUT,” some might ask, “how will we separate the sacred from the worldly?”) God helps us to navigate that...

1. **Mat 6:33a.** “Seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness...” (Placing the Creator as top priority keeps our creational priorities in order.)

2. **Rom 12:2.** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (God’s will is to live incarnationally with renewed minds in a fallen world.)