

Gardens

Part 1

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[00:00:00] I notice it's somewhat customary now for speakers to say that they're glad to be here.

Well, I think I can say genuinely I'm very glad to be here. I was reminded it's nearly 50 years since first I spoke in this hall. Of course it was a little different then, but the Lord hasn't changed. And as I cast my mind back over the precious seasons we've had in this hall, I can only ask that the Lord will do it again. So with this in mind, let us open our Bibles.

Let us read first in Genesis chapter 2.

[00:01:18] Verse 8.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden. And there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden. And hence it was parted and became four heads.

[00:02:03] We'll turn over to chapter 3.

Verse 18.

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.

Verse 19.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground. For out of it was thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

And now we turn to Isaiah chapter 5.

Verse 1.

[00:03:02] Now will I sing to my well-beloved the song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also a winepress therein. And

he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

And now in Corinthians in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians.

Verse 9, part of the verse.

[00:04:06] Ye are God's husbandry.

I think I'll leave it at that, because there'll be a few verses quoted in that connection. But we'll leave it at 1 Corinthians 3, verse 9.

And now I'd like to turn you back, please, to John's Gospel.

Chapter 18.

When Jesus had spoken these words, that upper room discourse, [00:05:04] he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden, into the which he entered and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place. For Jesus often resorted thither with his disciples.

And now in the 19th chapter, verse 41.

Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden. And in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never yet, was never man yet made.

[00:06:01] I'll turn you back, please, to the Song of Solomon.

Or, verse 12.

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.

A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

The chutes, thy chutes, are an orchard of pomegranates with precious fruits. Camphor with spikenard.

Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, [00:07:04] with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.

Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits. I'm coming to my garden, my sister, my spouse. I've gathered my myrrh with my spice. I've eaten my honeycomb with my honey.

I've drunk my wine with my milk. Look, eat, O friends. [00:08:01] Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

With the Lord's help tonight, I would like to speak a little about gardens.

I know some of you are very keen on gardens, some less so. But in the scripture there are many gardens which can command our attention. And I'll tell you at once what has drawn my mind to this subject. It's a very remarkable thing that when God placed man on the earth, the place chosen for him was a garden.

[00:09:03] It's a very remarkable thing that the destination in store for man is a garden. We begin in Eden, but already there is that place described to us as paradise.

And paradise is a Persian word speaking of an enclosed garden.

And I'm told by Mr. Vine that to the Oriental mind it represents the summation of all blessedness. The dying thief was to be with Christ in paradise.

We know from the scripture in Revelation 2.7 that the overcomer in Ephesus [00:10:05] is to have right to the tree of life which is in paradise. And we know likewise that when Paul was caught up to the third heaven, it was into paradise. And he heard there words, unspeakable words, which we understand are too sacred for communication. So that we begin the story in Eden, and we finish the story in paradise. And my concern tonight is that we might look a little at what God is expecting from his own, before ever we reach the final destination.

[00:11:01] Now with this in mind, we'll quickly run through the scriptures which we have read. In the first scripture in Eden, we find the kind of garden into which man was placed. We find there that there was every provision. There was fruit that was pleasant to sight, good for food.

And we notice too that it was a well-watered place. It must have been a magnificent sight, you know, the garden. We read of other gardens. Perhaps some of you have heard of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The gardens of Babylon, the hanging gardens of Nebuchadnezzar.

The seven wonders of the world, they must have been wonderful. [00:12:03] But they're not to compare with Eden, before the curse came in. And that was the place where man was put.

We find, consequent upon sin coming in, in the third chapter, that instead of bringing forth all these wonderful fruits, thorns also and briars shall appear unto thee. And in the sweat of thy face, not the brow only, but of the face, thou shalt eat bread. Consequent upon sin coming in, God's thoughts are interrupted, shall we say, by the intrusion of the enemy.

When we turn over to Isaiah 5, we find God's thoughts relative to Israel. We find there a vineyard, a very fruitful hill, [00:13:06] the stones gathered out, the tower, the wine press, the very choicest vine is planted, God looks for fruit. What comes forth? Wild grapes.

And we know that this, sadly, has been the case of Israel's history. We know that, chosen of God, his earthly people, with every provision, the law given was broken. The prophets, to recall the people to the broken law, stoned. The Messiah presented, crucified. Sour grapes indeed.

And it's in this situation we get some evidence of, shall we say, down-to-earth situations. [00:14:06] Has the assembly fared any better?

We find in this scripture, in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 10, we are God's husbandry. If we had read in

Matthew chapter 15, somewhere about verse 13, I think, every plant that hasn't been planted by the Heavenly Father, these are the words of the Lord Jesus, will be rooted out. While men slept, we read in the 13th chapter, there was not only wheat in the field, but tares. And we have to face the situation, beloved brethren, that be it in Eden, or with Israel, or with the present church period, there has been the activity of Satan. [00:15:03] And in this situation, instead of being able to pursue the original thoughts of God, we have a situation which the brethren used to speak of as mixed conditions.

Now we can see, in the light of this, the importance of the verses in John's Gospel. In the 18th chapter, consequent upon the upper room discourse and prayer, we find that Jesus went into a garden.

He oft times resorted there.

Judas also knew the place.

And I think there's an indication here of those scenes that we so often meditate upon [00:16:04] on the Lord's Day morning. When the Lord faced this down-to-earth situation of which we've been speaking, and he met it in the power of infinite love and divine power, and how well we meditate on the situation between the beginning of chapter 18 and the end of chapter 19.

He went into that garden, you remember, with the eleven. He left eight of them at the gate.

He went forward with three, Peter, James, and John.

[00:17:05] And he was alone. Withdrawn, as it were, a stone's cast.

And there we get enacted what we speak of, I think feelingly, in our meetings. Our sins, our guilt, in love divine, confessed and borne by thee.

This is the situation of the strong crying and the tears. There was a perfect understanding of the work that he had come to do. And in the light of it, not my will, but thine be done.

Of course, we moved on to the scenes of his arrest.

[00:18:08] I am, they went away and fell backward to the ground. Before Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin.

Pilate, Herod, Pilate, the soldiers. We would have a very suitable subject for our meditation, wouldn't we? But on the cross, we hear him say, it is finished.

And we know very well, he was made a curse for us.

In his own body, he bore our sins upon the tree. He was made sin for us. And you know sin, that we should be made the righteousness of God in him. Through the eternal spirit, he offered himself without spot to God.

[00:19:05] Dearly beloved, when we come to the scripture that I hope to engage you with particularly tonight, I want you to understand, I want to understand better myself, that there's a divinely perfect foundation for God to accomplish what he set out to do. And what is more, he's looking for a present

answer to it. In our lives individually, and in our lives collectively, how can it be done? It can be done consequent upon an accomplished redemption, a man at God's right hand, and a divine person on earth. Now I do hope that we can ponder a little bit these scriptures in the Song of Solomon, [00:20:06] as something of a gathering together of thoughts that will spring to mind, my mind, your mind, as we consider them, bringing before our minds the blessedness, the blessed possibility of answering to his thoughts, here and now, before we're introduced into his presence forever. So let us look rather more carefully at these verses in the fourth chapter of the Song. It may be necessary to just refresh your memory a little bit in regard to this section of Holy Scripture. I suppose most of you have heard of Jerome, the man who gave the Latin Bible to his day. [00:21:09] He was one who was interested in the education of the saints. This was a curriculum drawn up for children, actually. And he says, in this curriculum, the last book to study is the Canticles. And you know, although we don't quote Jerome often in our meetings, I'm going to suggest to you that this book, probably, is the book that we'll come to last as we pursue our meditations in Scripture.

I don't think any of us will get into this book until we're pretty well grounded in the other streams of truth that come to us from out of God's Holy Word.

[00:22:08] It's a song.

Of course, there are other songs in the Scripture. There's a song of creation.

The morning star sang together. All the sons of God shouted for joy. That's the first song.

There's a song of Exodus 15, the first song recorded. A song of redemption.

Songs of victory.

Josaphat, if you like, 2 Chronicles 20. All the songs in the Psalms. Praise and thanksgiving to God. But there's no song quite like Solomon's song. Song of songs. It's a song of love.

[00:23:02] Now, in order to understand this section of the Word, it's necessary to have some outline, for correct exegesis, of what this book has to say.

When the Church is taken home to glory, God is going to resume his dealings with his ancient people.

The two tribes, returned to the land, are going to be passed through the most awful tribulation. The such, the like, has not been known in this world since time began. And God is going to work with them. And he's going to work with them in three steps. And I'm giving you those three steps, [00:24:02] in case any would like to pursue this matter further. It's worth doing. The prophetic page, may I tell you, occupies a quarter of your Bible. And you can't neglect it without loss. I know there are some who downgrade prophecy. Don't do it. Upgrade it.

There are three steps in regard to the recovery of Israel. Important steps for them, and steps which we can follow for ourselves. What are they?

The first step is that God's going to speak to their conscience. Israel has been responsible for the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah.

And they've got to be brought to feel the weight of this on their conscience. [00:25:01] The first step is repentance.

And if you want one book in the Old Testament that will underline this, it's the book of Lamentations.

But God doesn't only look for repentance. He's looking to recover the affections of his people.

He loves them.

And he wants to see a response to his love. And that's what the canticles is all about.

I don't think it should be difficult for us to see the relevance of that truth for you and me, and for the church today.

Repentance.

Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. [00:26:03] We start that way. And the deeper the repentance, the better. You'll not read the biography of any man, or any woman either, who's made a mark for God, who hasn't been brought down very low in the matter of repentance.

That's only stage one.

The second stage is to know the love of Christ, which powers of knowledge.

I think the very first thing you teach the children in the Sunday school, isn't it? Jesus loves me.

Good start.

Listen to the Apostle Paul, the Son of God who loved me, gave himself for me. I think as you get older, you find that the most wonderful thing is the simplest thing. [00:27:08] That the love of God rests upon you, upon me. Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Think of all the expenditure of the love of God that's been lavished upon us. Think of all that's now administered from God's right hand. God is at love.

And this book speaks of the development of the affections of his people. And it's a very important lesson for us to learn.

Well, I have broken in right in the middle of the book, just to show you, following this line of the garden, just what God is looking for with his people. And the wonderful thing is that he can see it before it actually comes into existence. [00:28:05] And it's always a good thing to know the end of which God's working, so that we can embrace it, and in our measure, answer to it. So let us look at these verses from 12 to 15, in chapter 4 of the Canticles, and see if we can extract some honey out of the scriptures before us.

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.

Let's pause at that.

An enclosed garden.

Actually, in this section, you find he calls it my garden, twice.

[00:29:01] And you find when the bride speaks, it's his garden. So you can see it's a private garden.

In the course of my travels, I found myself once in Cairo, when Farouk was the king. And he's got an enormous wall around his garden.

The Lord Jesus also wants to see a sharp distinction between you and me, between us, his people, and the world through which we're passing. John 17.

They are not of this world, even as I am not of this world.

[00:30:01] Keep them from the evil.

Sanctify them through the truth. Thy word is free.

Accompany altogether like himself.

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.

I wonder how far we answer to this practically.

We've been speaking of the heart. Have you ever thought just how many scriptures there are, in relation to our affections, to put God first? Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of the issues of life. A message for us individually, a message for us company-wise.

[00:31:10] Little children, keep yourself from idols. And what temptations there are for us in a world like this.

Get up the loins of your mind.

Have you ever thought what a battle there is for our minds today? Morning till evening, bombarded if you allow it.

We have to gird up the loins of our minds, bringing every thought, captivity to Christ.

[00:32:04] How about the burdens of the day? Have you got cares?

Is there any provision? There is. We can quote the scripture, casting all your care upon him. We care for you in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known unto God. The excitations are easy. Do we think of carrying them out?

Now if we do, I think we'll be measuring a little bit up to this scripture, a garden enclosed is my beloved.

Just think of the blessedness of such a garden.

A heart that's welling up in a good matter. [00:33:02] A mind whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, good report. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. How far is our mind open for all the traffic of the day? And how far is it preserved?

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.

A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

I think this is linked.

If you want a garden in a dry place, the secret is water. In Isaiah, the Lord has to say of Israel, they're a garden without water. [00:34:06] When they're recovered, a well-watered garden.

In Australia, the secret is to have your own water supply. Some people have windmills. The modern idea is little artesian wells. My brother has a little well.

And so he keeps a water supply for his own garden. And what is the well that we have?

The spirit was not yet because that Jesus was not yet glorified. The water that waters the divine garden is the Holy Spirit of God. A divine person here. [00:35:02] What? Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost?

I don't think anybody who really wants to be in this world for God can ignore the function, not only the present, but the activity of the Holy Spirit, either individually or in the company.

If I had time, and there isn't time, I'd like to take you through the eighth chapter of Romans, seven presentations of the Spirit. Or the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17, seven presentations of the Spirit, for the individual. In Galatians, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall in no wise fulfill the lust of the flesh. [00:36:02] A divine person within.

And the marvelous thing is that what we prove in an individual way is introductory to what we can prove in relation to the assembly. We forget sometimes that the assembly is the habitat of God through the Spirit.

The assembly is the temple of God.

The assembly is the anointed vessel. When he was here, he was anointed. Now that he is not here, the assembly is in the gain of the anointing. [00:37:03] For by one Spirit are we baptized into one body.

And what we prove in an individual way, we can prove in a company way.

And how very much we're needing to get a hold of this again, beloved brethren. When I was young, I was brought up in a church. Everything was done by the minister. When you walked into the church in the morning, even the hymns were up on the board. The minister used to follow his pattern in his Bible readings. Even the prayers written out for him.

Singing? Why, there's a choir. They did the singing. [00:38:02] What room for the Spirit in that situation? You know, the brethren used to say that the creed of the brethren, and the foundation upon

which we meet together, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now let us just ponder ourselves, and ponder and ask ourselves, how far we've departed from that pattern. The determination to get back to a fixed order of things, fixed speakers.

You know, when Darby was buried, the funeral wasn't taken by a brother.

There were about half a dozen brethren who took part.

The pattern that we stand for is the liberty of the Spirit. [00:39:06] And I think you ought to be very careful, beloved brethren, that we don't drift back, or even run back, to the very system that some of us have come out of. Now how is it going to be done? It's not going to be done by an earthquake, I don't think. I think it will be done as we individually begin to prove the reality of the movements of the Spirit in our own lives first. We can't speak of the leading of the Spirit in the meetings, if we're not proving the leading of the Spirit in our lives, can we? But if we are in the game of this divine person, in our individual history, we'll be looking for the gain of the Spirit's movements when we do come together. And if I may say so, beloved brethren, there's nothing, I almost said, more thrilling, [00:40:06] that's hardly the word, more exhilarating, more uplifting, than to come to a meeting, you don't know what's going to happen, but at least you've been preparing yourself, and lo and behold, that's just the life. And there's another brother, he's able to add to it. Why? At the end of the time, you find your heart's been engaged with Christ, and you've been lifted up into a sphere beyond imagination, as the Spirit of God takes over.

This has brought, perhaps, before us, I think, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Now, why is that mentioned? You remember when Sennacherib came down to Jerusalem?

Ezekiel said, you're not going to get hold of my water, no, no. [00:41:05] And he sealed up all the springs outside of the city walls. And if you're a visitor to Jerusalem now, and you don't suffer from claustrophobia, you can walk from Siloam's Pool to the Virgin's Spring, through Hesychias Tunnel. 1,777 feet, I've done it.

But the important thing is, don't let Hesychias, the enemy from outside, get the water. Bring it in, bring it into the Pool of Siloam. And if you read the 52nd chapter of Jeremiah, you'll find that's where the King's Garden was. Water that was protected from enemy action. Of course, there's another place where you've got to put the lid on, shall I say, [00:42:03] when the Philistines are about. They fill up the wells. What do they fill them up with? Earth.

So it's a question of looking after Hesychias. It's a question of looking after the Philistines, in order that the water supply is preserved. And that's what God is looking for in his garden. If the water's there, results will follow. What are they?

First of all, we find an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits. Plenty of fruit in his garden. I'll be briefer on these sections, because it's pretty obvious. If you've got a garden enclosed with plenty of water, there's bound to be results, fruit. And if you read the fifth chapter of Galatians, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, [00:43:07] that's our life, God would.

Long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, that's our lives with one another. Fidelity, meekness, self-control, that's in relation to ourselves. That's the kind of fruit that God is looking for, where the Spirit is producing the results. We often look at that verse, don't we, in Genesis chapter 1, that the fruit is

always after its kind.

And if the corn of wheat has fallen into the ground, died, bringeth forth much fruit after its kind. [00:44:09] You find the fruit of it, for example, in the seventh chapter of Acts, with Stephen, when filled with the Holy Spirit, looking up, engaged with Christ at the Father's right hand. He comes out in the features of Christ.

Fruit.

That's what's found here. Fruit.

And then, fragrance.

Camphor, spikenard, calamus, cinnamon, all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, and all chief spices.

You know, there's something about scent that can't exactly be described. [00:45:01] If you have a honeysuckle in the garden, in the evening, with a breeze, what a smell.

Or the broom.

Not a very handsome-looking plant, is it? But what a delightful scent. A broom. Or a rose.

You can't describe, really, the beauty of a rose, can you? Or those lion aloes, in the numbers, you know. I'm always challenged by that. I don't know whether you are. But they tell us that as the lion aloes gets older, it also gets sweeter. Rather testing, isn't it? And is there something about us that bespeaks the fact that we've been with Jesus? Moses, you know, six weeks in the presence of God, his face shone.

[00:46:09] I wonder how far we really carry, not the knowledge of Scripture about with us, but something of the fragrance of the blessed man, who is altogether fragrant to God.

Is that fragrance upon us? A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. It's quite clear that the streams of this garden went outside of the garden. There was such a welling forth of water, that others were getting the benefit of it. And I believe that if we were in the gain of it individually, and in our meetings, there'd also be an outreach.

[00:47:05] It's very interesting in the Canticles, isn't it, that one of the methods used in connection with stirring up the affections of the bride, was to bring her into the place where she had to bear testimony to her beloved. What is thy beloved more than another beloved? And presented with such a challenge, how well she answered. Altogether lovely.

Dinner and so good, of course. And dearly beloved brethren, it does our hearts good too, when we tell others about Jesus. Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season. It's wonderful, you know, as you do have leisure. [00:48:01] Some of us have enough leisure.

And even if we haven't, if there's the opportunity, try and weave a scripture into your conversation. And you'll find that even unconverted people blink their eyes. They sometimes ask questions. And if

you don't feel equal to it, may I recommend a tract.

There's some good little tracts, you know. One-page tracts.

I mention this one because chapter 2 has printed 200,000 of them. And of all the tracts that come out from that depot, which I suppose must run into about millions, beautiful tracts, this one, that doesn't look very pretentious, [00:49:01] is the most fruitful.

Because it's only got the words of scripture in it. And at the end, if you're interested, you can write up, and you can get a New Testament, or a Bible course, or if you wish it, a conversation, or even come along to a Bible study. And you know, such has been the response to this tract, that the voluntary worker in chapter 2 now has to put in three days a week to put on the computer the people who are responding to this tract. All I'm saying, beloved brethren, is tell it again. Tell it again.

Till none of the children of men shall say, Never anybody told me before.

Now this, I suggest, is the figure that comes before us [00:50:04] in Canticles chapter 5 of the assembly as a garden. Properly, of course, Israel.

In application, ourselves.

It's so easy for us to make mistakes, of course. We can be active in the assembly sphere, so busy with hedging and ditching, as it's sometimes called, attending to the walls, that we forget about the fruit, and the flowers. Sometimes we're so busy about the flowers and the fruit, we forget about the walls. Sometimes we're so busy about getting on with the gospel, we forget about what's inside. We can be so busy about ourselves, we forget about the gospel. So we've got to be balanced in the matter, haven't we? But you find here words that, I confess, [00:51:03] I have misunderstood for many years.

Look at verse 16. I won't be long finishing if you at least need to get away. Awake, O north wind, and come thou south. Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Who's speaking?

Well, I tell you the mistake that I've made for a long time. I have thought this was the bride speaking.

I thought this was an invitation. Blow, O north wind, come thou south. Not at all.

I think if you look at the matter carefully, this is the language of the bridegroom. He's the one who has in mind that the spices should flow out. [00:52:04] I ask you to ponder this. The bridegroom knows best what will bring out the spices. Sometimes it's the north wind of adversity, and sometimes it's the south wind of prosperity. Now who's going to decide? If it was in your hands or in mine, we'd be wanting the south wind all the time, wouldn't we? Well, it might not be for our best.

It sometimes is the north wind. But you can be sure that if it's the north wind, it won't always be in the north. It'll turn round to the south. But as to the timing of it, it's in the hands of the one who knows best how to order our education.

Now this springs forth at the end of verse 16. [00:53:03] Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his precious pleasant fruits. That's the invitation to come. Verse 1 of chapter 5.

I am coming to my garden. Now this rather supposes that he's not always in the garden. But he delights to come into his garden. He delights to be constrained. And what happens if he does come in? Eat, oh friends. Drink, drink abundantly, oh my beloved. You know, in the 24th chapter of Luke, they constrained him to come into the house.

They couldn't get back to Jerusalem quick enough, couldn't they? And what a feast they got in the upper room.

[00:54:04] Peace be unto you.

Now I believe that if our hearts, individually, if our companies, collectively, are in a situation where we can constrain him to come in, we'll be amazed at what a feast he can spread.

But it's dependent upon conditions on our side.

You know, you don't grow flowers, and you don't produce fruits overnight.

We sometimes say, we have to prepare on Saturday night for Lord's Day morning, that's good, amen.

But you're better to start on Lord's Day night, [00:55:01] and carry it on through the week. And then we'll find, when we come together, the basket is full, and we'll just be waiting for the master musician to strike the chord. And if others have been doing it, you'll find that the melodious result, that's one figure. Or using this picture, that we've found conditions where we can entertain the Lord of glory, and he'll lead us to the Father.

Now you can see that's rather a scattered collection of thoughts tonight. But I hope that it might leave some impression with you, as to what the Lord is looking for.

May we answer to it, for his name's sake.

[00:56:05] Shall we sing the little hymn, 340. Father, we commend our spirits to thy love. In Jesus' name, love which his atoning merits, give us confidence to claim.

By the Holy Ghost anointed, may we do the Father's will.

The path by him appointed, all his pleasure to fulfil. 340.