

A Good Garden

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[0 : 00] Now, I'm not much of a gardener. In fact, because my wife's here, I have to say I'm not a gardener at all. I'm kind of a hole digger to enable her to plant things in the garden.

But I do enjoy seeing the beauties and walking around a lovely garden. And there are the ingredients of the garden that I enjoy, especially the fruits of the fruit trees.

What makes for a successful garden? Well, one of the things is, of course, for a start, no sheep get in to eat everything. The soil itself must be suitable.

There needs to be plenty of water and sun and shelter. And for a garden to look and smell good, you need variety. Different colours and types of flowers and bush and shrub.

What lies behind every grape gardener is a knowledgeable and dedicated gardener. Someone who knows what they're doing, and that's not me.

[1 : 23] But whether you look at a piece of ground at the back of your house and think flowers and shrubs or fence to fence concrete, the Bible uses the picture of a beautiful, well-kept garden to describe the spiritual relationship between God and his people.

And the Bible is a picture of a beautiful, and that's a picture of a beautiful garden. You remember that at the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, the garden of Eve. And illustration, that way of conveying the relationship between God and his people continues in the Bible as a picture, as a garden, picturing that relationship.

And it's so in the Song of Solomon, in what we've just read. And in chapter 4 of the Song, and the verses 12 to 16, we've got a great example of this.

It's hard for us to understand the description of the bride as like a goat or like sheep's teeth, but we can understand the picture of the garden.

And we can understand something of that example that we have. And it's that that I want us to look at in these verses 12 to 16.

[2 : 54] It celebrates the whole of the Song, celebrates the love and affection between a man and a woman. And in this case, it cuts across the class barriers, the king and the peasant girl.

And of course, that's the analogy of the Christ, the king of kings and lord of lords, relating to us, his church.

We are the peasants, we are the lowest of the low. And yet there is that love between him and us, and to a lesser extent, a more fickle extent, our love to him.

And it's likened in that relationship to a garden. So we need to look at some of the things that are being said here, and to see and to understand what this analogy is as we look at the garden.

First of all, we notice that it's a place of security. Verse 12 says, You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride.

[4 : 23] Now, it's important for us to realise the kind of garden we're looking at here. It's not just a little patch behind the house. It's an expansive, fertile, fruitful extent of land in the ancient Middle East.

If you've been to the Middle East, or you've seen pictures of the Middle East, you realise that there's a lot of dry, barren areas. A lot of desert scrubland around.

Perhaps you've seen pictures of Iraq or Afghanistan, and you see just how dusty and dry it all is.

And you can imagine seeing a fertile parkland with green plants and flowers and fruits growing up, vegetables, and just so fertile.

This is the church. We're in a barren land, a barren world, but we are the fertile expanse of the Garden of God.

[5 : 51] This is the garden. This is the picture that we are to have here of this garden, a parkland, green and fertile. It was an area that supplied not only flowers, sweet smells and the colours, but

also was a source for vegetables and food, sustenance.

There were all kinds of vegetables there that would grow exotic fruits.

But it was also a source for medicines as well, herbal medicines. So it was a place of well-being and healing as well as of sustenance, a place where you would want to be.

That's the church in a barren world. Typically there is within this garden, as here in the Sama Sons, a well.

It's not just a well where you dip the bucket down, but it's a place where you can go to bathe and to be clean and to be refreshed in a hot, dusty climate, which the Middle East is.

[7 : 24] It's a place where you can go to bathe and to be refreshed. This is the garden of the Lord. This is the church. This is us in our Lord, in this world.

Now, if you've got a lovely garden like that, you try and, if you're the gardener, you try and stop intruders getting in, throwing litter everywhere, cutting down the trees and picking the flowers and trampling over everything.

And in earthly terms, people put up walls with broken glass in the top, which will slow down at least intruders and stop them from climbing over, or they'll door the wall with anti-vandal paint, or they'll put up warning notices.

One school had a warning notice, no chest was in without permission.

We try to stop the intruder, the wrecker of the garden.

[8 : 48] And we see that this garden here, described in the Song of Solomon, has a wall around it. It's enclosed. It's enclosed. It's protected.

Protected from intruders, both people and animals. And we understand that that's true of the church.

Jesus speaks about the church as being like a sheepfold, enclosed by a wall. Those who climb up and try and get in, other than through the gate, are thieves and robbers.

And so the garden here has this wall to stop intruders. If you're not in the church, you're outside.

And there's only one way in. And that's through the gate, which is Jesus Christ. So it's important for us at this stage to ask the question, Well, I'm here in the building.

[9 : 58] Am I in the church? Do I belong to Christ? Or am I an intruder who has climbed in some other way, other than Christ?

Perhaps tradition, perhaps an upbringing. Perhaps you're here because you think that if you come to church and endure church, God will look favorably upon you.

Perhaps you think if I pray, then God will hear me because of my prayers. Or maybe you think that if you read your Bible, then God will accept you.

If these are the grounds and the basis of your trying to be in the garden, trying to be in the church, trying to relate to God.

It's not the way. You're an intruder. You must come through Jesus Christ and faith in Him. There is no other way.

[11 : 11] However good you try to be, whatever your family heritage and ancestry is, however long you've been coming to church, these don't count.

What counts as being in Jesus Christ. This is a garden with a wall around it. And there is only one way in.

Jesus Christ. The church is secure though. The church is secure though. Christ has put a wall around His people to secure them.

It's a wall around His bride to protect from intruders and invaders. We're in this sad state where there are, not so far from us now, those who are seeking to destroy at least what they see and understand as a Christian heritage.

And there are enemies, avowed enemies of the people of the cross. There are those within the world who seek to destroy Christ's bride.

[12 : 40] There are others who scoff and mock and papoo Christianity and Christians. And there are those within our communities who seek to shut out Christianity.

These are those who also are seeking to destroy Christ's bride, us who are His. Christ has a wall of protection around us.

A protection which will preserve and keep His people forever. You see those bombers and those who come at people with knives and with vans and cars and seek to destroy what they see as our Christian heritage.

They cannot destroy us as Christians. We belong to Jesus Christ. They may take away our love, this love, but they can't take us away from Christ.

His love extends beyond our physical death. We are His. We are His. If we die and when we die, we go to be with the Lord.

[14:06] He has hold of us. We are secure in Him. He has built a wall around His garden to keep His people secure and safe forevermore.

We are secure in the world. But only His people. If you are outside that garden, you have no promise of life. You have no eternal life yet to come.

Only as you come in do you have life. But if we have come by faith in Jesus Christ, we are safe in Him.

Like poor Brandon making a mess. Yet we are safe. Christ has hold of us.

And no one and nothing can snatch us out of His hand. We are safe forevermore in Him.

[15:23] Even when we grow cold, He still has hold of us. He fans that love and that passion for Him within us by His Spirit.

We are safe. But also that garden with its wall around it is set apart.

It's separated from the desert outside and all the dust and dryness and barrenness of the world. We are set apart for Jesus Christ.

The gardener has put a wall around His church. Not only to protect it, but also to ensure His privacy within the church too.

It belongs to Him. And we belong to Him. And He desires to enjoy His garden.

[16:32] You can see that in the song. The delight the King has for His beloved. So it is with Christ.

We are set apart for Him. We are His bride and no other. He's dedicated to us and we should be dedicated to Him.

Christ has committed Himself to His bride.

And we are to commit ourselves to Him. In Christ's heart there is room for no other but His bride.

And in our hearts there should be room for no other than Christ.

And the Apostle Paul takes this up as he writes in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 5. He says, Love your wives.

[17:42] Love your wives. Just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy. Cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

And to present her to Himself as a radiant church. That's what marriage is about. It's about the relationship of Christ and His church.

He determines to separate us from the world. And make us His own.

You see, we've come in from the world. And we've still got some of the muck and rubbish of the world with us.

But Christ is determined to separate us from everything. Except that which is His.

[18:49] He's devoted to us. We're His bride. We're His bride. He's totally dedicated to us.

Everything that He does in heaven is seated at the right hand of the Father. He's doing for us. Sometimes it may not seem like it.

When Christians are killed and persecuted, where's Christ then? We don't understand everything that He's doing.

And we don't see it all at the time. But we are to be assured that He's dedicated to His people.

He loves us. And He will never allow any harm to come to us. That's a real harm.

[19:44] That separates us from Him. The enemy can do what it likes. It can never separate us from Christ's love.

There's always a danger that there are more subtle means to draw us away from Him.

You see, we as a nation are standing up against the terrorists and saying we're not giving. And nor should we. But we're in danger from more subtle approaches from our enemy.

That would draw us away from Christ. We are such fools that we fall for it and allow it to happen. And we succumb.

And we're separated from Christ by all kinds of subtle ways.

[20:49] Paul again writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband to Christ so that I may present you as a pure virgin to Him.

But I'm afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's coming, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Watch out. What's drawing you away from Christ? Look carefully. It's subtle.

It's almost unnoticed. It's not a bomber. It's not a gunman. Or someone with a knife.

It's something that is ordinary. It's something we scarcely notice. Be on guard. Let nothing draw you away from Christ.

[21 : 55] For nothing will draw Him away from you. The Church of Christ mustn't simply go with the flow.

Sadly, the Church of Scotland seems to be doing. But it must stand firm. It must stand firm. For a true biblical marriage and a long life commitment.

Because it's the pattern of Christ and His Church. There are casualties amongst Christians.

Christians do succumb. And they go astray. We with tender hearts must endeavour through prayer, through coming alongside such people.

endeavour to bring them back. And the New Testament has instructions as to how we are to go about that.

[23 : 18] Of those who have gone astray. Those who have succumbed to the subtleties of that which is to draw us away from Christ.

We need each other. We need each other. We need each other. We need to encourage each other in our faith. And to stand alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And encourage one another to go on with Him. To love Him. And this is one of the reasons why we gather together on the Lord's Day.

In order that we might have fellowship one with another. And encourage each other through the difficulties of our life. To continue with Christ.

To see His beauty and His desirability. And to come near Him. Well, time's almost gone.

[24 : 17] And we've only looked at verse 12 so far. Verse 13 tells us that your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits. With henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon.

With every kind of incense tree. With myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. Here the Lord Jesus talks about His bride to be a kind of paradise.

The word paradise. The word orchard is actually, in Hebrew, is actually exactly what our English word paradise means.

It's an orchard. And it brings to mind the pleasant parks and gardens with the great residents of the Persian monarchs. Here's a picture of Christ.

Here's a picture of Christ. In his garden. In Christ's garden there's a tremendous variety of trees and plants and fruits and spices.

[25 : 27] Which please His eye and His taste and His smell. Here's a picture of Christ. Here's a picture of the spiritual character of the church.

It underlines the fact that there is, where there's life there is fruit. And it has to be that we are fruitful as Christians.

We have the life of Christ within us. Within us as individuals and within us as the church.

And we are to produce fruit in this garden of His. Paul again in Ephesians 5.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light. For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

[26 : 31] And find out what pleases the Lord. Our aim then should be to please our bridegroom, Christ. And to display those variety of spiritual graces in our life.

As individuals and as the church. They're the things that Paul describes in Galatians 5. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

These fruits are to grace us as His people. They're not natural.

They're not the things that we find growing in human nature in general. These are spiritual qualities.

They're special. We find that some people are more friendly than others in the world.

[27 : 39] They're more sociable than others. And this is just a matter of temperament and upbringing. But these spiritual qualities are those graces, those fruits that are given to us by the Holy Spirit.

And these are to characterize us as God's people. As the Garden of Christ. The writer of this song describes again the church as a garden fountain, a well of flowing water.

This is a picture of spiritual life. This is a picture of spiritual life flowing and springing up from within. But these wells don't come from nowhere.

They come from a source. They come from the mountains. mountains, the mountain streams flowing down to water the garden. It's pointing to these this life coming from Christ.

Coming from Christ. From the snow of Lebanon and its cool waters flowing in the waters of Christ. We didn't time to look at that in detail but you can think that through yourself.

[29 : 02] You see it comes from Christ laying down his life on the cross. This is where we get our life from. Meditate about that.

On the mount of crucifixion he opened a deep and the fountains were opened deep and wide. Through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide. From the beginning to the very end of our walk it's to be with God.

And always we're dependent upon this heavenly source of life that comes through Christ. and finally we see that in verse 16 he says awake north wind and come south wind blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad.

and it's now the bride's turn to speak. Her one desire is to please her love. She's deeply aware of her need of the work of God in her life so she speaks in a prayer and she prays for the winds of the north and the south.

[30 : 34] Let me just say a little bit about these winds. The east wind is generally a withering and tempestuous wind in the middle east and the west wind brings from the Mediterranean sea the clouds of rain dark damp air.

The north wind as we know only too well the north wind is a cold wind but in a hot country it's a welcome cool wind and it's refreshing.

So the north wind is not what we imagine the north wind to be shivering in winter but cool refreshing wind in a hot country.

The south wind it comes it's a it's a hotter wind but it's never a stormy wind. And so what the what the bride is asking for the north and the south winds to blow and we mustn't think of it in terms of what we think of as these winds but they reflect the work of the Holy Spirit.

the north when cool and gracing sweeps away spiritual gloom and unbelief and the south wind gentle warm and moist Christ awakens the life of great sinners.

[32 : 08] we should be praying for the Holy Spirit to come to us and to refresh us and to awaken us and to challenge us in the service of the King.

Christ walks in his garden he tastes its fruit he delights and he will not withhold his spirit from those who ask him.

Are you praying then for his spirit to come to come upon the church again anew and afresh to refresh us to enlighten us that we might be a voice again in our land that speaks of Christ that sets him forth in his beauty you see it's not us we're to be pointing to it's him and we need the spirit in order to have the strength to do that to have the wisdom in doing that that we might set our saviour forth we are nothing the church the bride describes herself as dark and unloving it's Christ who makes us beautiful not ourselves but we are to set him forth we are to blow with the winds of the spirit of him that's exactly what the holy spirit is given for that he might testify of Christ well may God grant to us first of all that we're in the government that we are the government because we belong to him but then that we magnify him and are to his praise and all that he plan we are going to better■■ oh and