

God's Garden

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[0 : 00] Tonight I'd like us just to turn for a few minutes back to Genesis chapter 2, and in particular we're going to look at verse 8, which is right there, the Lord God planted a garden in Eden.

When we think back to Genesis chapter 1, 2 and 3 in the Garden of Eden, we are thinking about many of the big events that took place when God created the world and when He created humanity. And in many ways, these first three chapters of the Bible are crucial chapters. They contain information that is vital for our understanding of the whole Bible and for the whole of life. And so you will often find that people like me in sermons, even if they're preaching from somewhere way further on in the Bible, they'll come back to Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and probably especially Genesis chapter 3.

Huge themes are set before us in this chapter. We've got the origin of the world, the creation of humanity, the institution of marriage, the setting apart of the Sabbath day, the mandate for humanity to fill and rule the earth.

[1 : 14] And then in Genesis chapter 3, we read about the tragic fall of humanity when God's commandment was disobeyed.

So there's loads of big, big, big, big, big themes in these chapters. Tonight we're going to look at none of them. And what I want to do is actually put all of these big themes to one side, not because they're not important, they're so important and we will no doubt come back to them and think about them again and again and again.

But I want to put them to one side tonight because I want to do something a wee bit different tonight. I want us simply to think about the fact that when God created humanity, the environment that he chose to give them as their home was a garden.

At the heart of the perfection of God's creation, there was a garden. And tonight I want us just to think about God's garden.

And in particular, I want us to ask the question, what does that teach us about God? The fact that at the heart of his creation and that the heart of his purposes for humanity, there was this garden.

[2 : 32] What does that teach us about God? Well, we're going to look at eight things, eight things very quickly. They'll all be very quick. But I think that we learn eight things from a garden about God.

Number one, and maybe this is the most obvious, a garden is a place of life. So if you imagine in your mind a vibrant garden in the height of summer, then the one thing that you can definitely say about that garden is that it is bursting with life.

You think of the plants, the animals, the birds, they are all full of vitality. A garden is a place bursting with life. And that must have been so spectacularly true of the garden that God planted in Eden. Just try and picture the trees, the plants, the fruit, the vegetation, the wildlife. That garden must have been so full of life.

And that reminds us that God is the source and giver of life. And that is one of the great logical foundations for reality that the biblical worldview gives to us.

[3 : 47] The fact that the Bible explains the reality of life because of the reality of a giver of life. The whole reason we have life is because there is a giver of life, and that's God.

One of the fundamental truths about God is that He has life in and of Himself. He is self-sufficient. He's not in any way dependent on anything outside Himself.

God has life in and of Himself. The phrase we sometimes use to describe that is the aseity of God. So that's a word I want you to remember. I'm sure you all know it anyway, but we'll remind you of it. The aseity of God, that in and of Himself, that's kind of what the word means, of Himself, God has life. He is self-sufficient.

He can give life to creation because He has life in and of Himself. Out of that abundant self-sufficiency, He creates this universe and this garden.

[4 : 52] And that reminds us of a really important point that although God is independent, so He doesn't depend on anything else, He is not introverted. Instead, He has poured out life into this creation.

His creative power has brought energy to the whole universe. It's brought life to planet Earth. And in the vibrancy of this garden, we see all the amazing results of God's life-giving power.

So that garden, the Garden of Eden, was full of life, and that's grounded in the fact that it was God who planted it. He is the source, He is the origin, He is the giver of life, He is the Creator.

Now when people explore the world of science, they discover all sorts of amazing insights into how that life works.

And what you discover is just astonishing. But none of that should intimidate us as Christians. It should simply make us marvel all the more at what God has made.

[6 : 01] The more we look into it, the more we see the wonder of God's creative work. And one of the great anomalies of the modern world that we live in is that we accept the reality of life.

We value the experience of life. And yet we're quite happy to deny that there is a source of life.

Now I think it's impossible to see how that makes sense. I just can't see how that can work.

Which of course is why the biblical worldview makes perfect sense. God has life in and of Himself. His nature is such that He has the energy.

The resources, the power, and the ability to create a universe and to bring life to this planet and to plant an amazing garden. A garden is a place of life that teaches us that God is the giver of life.

[7 : 10] Number two, a garden is a place of beauty. So if you go back in your mind to that vibrant garden in the height of summer, what can you see?

Just think. You can see flowers. You can see plants. You can see trees. You can see fruit, colors, patterns.

All of that is bathed in warm sunshine and all the plants sway in a gentle breeze. The whole environment of a thriving garden is one of astounding beauty.

And there can be absolutely no doubt that the beauty of the garden that God planted in Eden would have been utterly breathtaking.

And in fact, Genesis makes that explicit. It says in verse nine, out of the ground, the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight.

[8 : 10] The writer of Genesis is wanting us to know that Eden looked stunning and looking around that garden was sheer pleasure.

That's reinforced as you go through this chapter. When it talks about the things that God has created, it refers to gold and onyx stones. It must have been so beautiful in that garden.

And it's a reminder that God makes things beautiful. And that's a really important point, that the life that God brings to His creation is not purely functional.

In other words, it's not just clinical or pragmatic or dutiful. It's not that God just puts together this kind of cold, clunking, well put together machine.

No, God's creation is extraordinarily beautiful. And just imagine being in the Garden of Eden and think about your five senses, okay?

[9 : 12] So think about what you would see. You'd see an abundance of blossoming flowers. You'd see magnificent strong trees, lush ripe fruit, glistening water, spectacular vibrant colors.

You would see amazing stuff. Think about what you would hear. You'd hear birds singing beautifully. You'd hear leaves rustling. You'd hear water gently flowing.

Think about what you would smell. You'd smell the delicate fragrance of flowers. You'd smell the freshness of grass and leaves. Who loves the smell of grass?

Grass smells so nice. The clean, crisp air. And it mentioned bedelium later on in verse 12. We all think what on earth is that?

Bedelium was a fragrant aromatic resin. In other words, it was something that smelled nice. Think of what you would taste.

[10 : 15] Now I absolutely love fruit. I eat. My poor wife has to spend a fortune on fruit. Love it. I eat. I don't eat five a day. I eat 12 a day.

So if you love fruit, just imagine the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Just think of the juicy oranges, the ripe grapes, the soft pears, the succulent olives, the crisp apples, the sweet tomatoes, the summer

strawberries.

It must have been so nice. It would have tasted so good. I think about what you would touch. You could go and you could touch these delicate petals on the flowers.

You could rub your hands in the soft grass, dip your hand in the cool water, hold onto the strong branches of the trees, touch the smooth leaves, the tender shoots that were growing up.

The beauty of that garden is mind-blowing. And it's a great reminder that the greatest artist, musician, perfumer, flavorer, and craftsman of all is God.

[11 : 27] He makes beautiful sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures. When God made a garden, it was stunningly beautiful. And of course, we still enjoy so much of that beauty today.

Scotland is a place of rare beauty. It's a stunning country. Further north and further west you go, the more stunning it gets. But it's a beautiful, beautiful place.

And we should always marvel at that creation and always enjoy it and appreciate what we have. It's a great reminder that if anyone thinks that the God of the Bible is dull or stale or lacking in an imagination, then they have a hopelessly inaccurate understanding of who God is.

The pinnacle of human art or music or taste is just a tiny, tiny reflection of the beauty that God is capable of.

God can do it to another level altogether. The Garden of Eden was beautiful because God makes things that are beautiful.

[12 : 41] Number three, a garden is a place of nourishment. So if you go back in your mind to that summer garden that you're picturing, it's a place of wonderful nourishment. So the plants are watered.

The soil provides nutrients. The sun gives light. The birds and the animals can find food. And even we ourselves can go and eat of the fruit of the trees or from the harvest of the field.

Eden was the same. It was a place of wonderful nourishment. Again, the same verse makes it clear, out of the ground, the Lord God made to spring up every tree that's pleasant to the sight and good for food.

The nourishment that humanity required was provided by this garden. Now, that reminds us of two great theological truths concerning God.

First, that God is the great sustainer of creation. If you look at the world, you see that it's an amazing balance of order and interdependence within the natural world, whereby so many different things have to fit together.

[13 : 46] So you've got light and minerals and sugar and oxygen and carbon dioxide, all of these different things combining in wonderful harmony to nurture life. So God doesn't simply create, he sustains the world that he has made.

But the second thing we see is that God provides for our needs. The reality of this garden meant that humanity had a perfect place to live, but that was only because God himself had provided it, which is a great reminder of the fact that God is concerned for your needs and for your nourishment.

So your body needs a very complex range of nutrients in order to stay alive, and in this garden, God provides them all. It's a great reminder of the kindness of God.

He knows what we need, so he provides what we need. He gives humanity a garden that will nourish and sustain them.

But I want you to notice something really important. The provision of nourishment that God makes is not simply adequate.

[15 : 03] It's good. So we have a God who does more than just the essential. He goes beyond the bare minimum.

He wants to provide us with nourishment that is really, really good. And that's why today, even though we live in a fallen world, we still enjoy the wonderful privilege of good nourishing food.

And of course, in our fallen condition, we can abuse that, which is why gluttony is a sin in exactly the same way that drunkenness is a sin. But if we avoid these pitfalls, we can still enjoy the amazing provision of God as He nourishes us with good food, which I have to say, all of us who are on the weekend away, we lived out that reality over these past two days.

Their food was wonderful. And it's to be enjoyed with thanksgiving to God. A garden is a place of nourishment because God wants to meet our needs.

Number four, a garden is a place of protection. It's very interesting that the Hebrew word for garden comes from the same root word as the word for defend or the word for shield.

[16:20] So for example, you have Isaiah 31.5. It says, like birds hovering, so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it. He will spare and rescue it.

Same root word, garden and the two protects that you have in that verse. A garden is a place of shelter, of protection and of safety.

And so when God made a garden for Adam and Eve, He was giving them a safe and secure place to live. And I think that we can relate to that when we think of our own gardens.

I can remember when I was wee growing up in Stornoway. It's a very embarrassing illustration, but anyway, I'll just do it. I remember walking home and if it was winter, it was dark, Stornoway's dark from October to March.

And you'd be walking up the road and I would walk up the road and I was, this is going to sound really silly, but I would come past the driveways on the street and I was always worried that there would be something or someone on the driveways and I was really nervous.

[17:34] What I would actually do is walk up the middle of the road. So it wasn't like we said it anyway, as I said, an embarrassing illustration. But as soon as I got into my own garden, I felt safe and felt secure.

And just think of Eden. Think of all the protection that I provided. Think of the shelter of the trees if it got too hot. Think of the security of sitting by the riverbank.

It was a safe place. Now, of course, when I say that, some of you might be immediately saying, well, Thomas, yeah, but if the garden was safe, how come the serpent got in?

But the point that we have to recognize in regard to that question, which is often asked in different ways, if Eden was so good, how come there was a serpent? That kind of question. What we have to recognize is the fact that God had already given Adam all that he needed to be safe from the serpent.

If you look at the narrative, you'll see that Adam is given dominion over all the animals. That's why he names them, because he has authority over them.

[18:40] So when the serpent comes and tries to influence Adam's behavior, all Adam has to do is remember that God has placed him in charge.

He should have exercised the authority that he had. He should have told the serpent to clear off. God had given Adam and Eve everything that they needed to be safe and secure.

And the fall happened because they doubted whether God really had their best interests at heart. And that's one of the reasons why the fall is so tragic, because the creation of this garden was such a clear statement to Adam and Eve that God cared so deeply for them, and that God wanted them to be safe and secure and comfortable.

And God has not changed. If you go through the whole Bible, you will see again and again and again, God provides things for people in order to protect them.

[19:46] God's law is there to protect His people. God's king always had a duty to defend His people. God's prophets came to warn people. God wants His people to be safe because God is a protective God.

And Jesus Himself reflected that when He spoke of His desire to gather Jerusalem under His wing to protect them. And I want you to never, ever forget that, that God wants you to be safe.

Now, sometimes that means that He'll tell you to avoid things that we are drawn to. That's what you do with children all the time, the amount of times you have to tell children not to do stuff in order to keep them safe.

And so when God tells us avoid that, it is only because of how deeply protective He is towards you. And yet so often, like Jerusalem, we forfeit God's protection because of our own unwillingness.

A garden is a place of protection because God is a protective God. Number five, a garden is a place of work.

[20:59] That's one of the great principles highlighted by the creation of the Garden of Eden, that a key part of God's original plan for humanity was that we would work the Lord God, took the man, put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

It's a great reminder that even though work is affected by the fall, it's not a consequence of the fall. We are created to work, to be active and to be fulfilling the role and responsibility that God has given us.

And that principle is very, very, very relevant when we think of a garden because any gardener here will tell you that looking after a garden requires a lot of work.

And that was true of Eden as well. It needed to be worked and kept, and that was Adam's job. That involves commitment and effort, but it brings great reward.

Anyone here who's got a nice garden, there's probably times where you're thinking, why am I doing all this work? And then in the middle of summer, on that hot, sunny day when the garden is bursting with life and with beauty, then I'm pretty sure everyone thinks it's well, well worth the work.

[22 : 11] God has made us to work, to work well, to work wisely, to work willingly. And in the garden placed in Eden, God gave us a wonderful environment for us to work.

It brought routine and purpose and achievement to Adam and Eve's lives. And of course, that's a great reminder that God doesn't like laziness.

God himself is never lazy, and part of our image-bearing role is to make sure that we are never lazy as well. And even though the fall has ruined work for us, and even though work is now hard toil, and sometimes our own jobs will be hard toil, the Garden of Eden's a great reminder that God's great plan was to give us a brilliant job, a stimulating, satisfying, rewarding role that brings purpose and fulfillment to our lives.

A garden is a place of work because God has made us to be workers, just like He is. Number six, a garden is a place of rest.

So yes, the Garden of Eden was a place of work, but it was also a place of rest. From the very beginning, that pattern of Sabbath rest was established by God. And you can see so much beautiful logic in what God is doing.

[23 : 32] God has created this magnificent garden for Adam and Eve. He wants them to work in it and look after it, and He then wants them to rest and enjoy it.

And that's a great reminder of what an incredibly positive thing the Sabbath principle is. And sometimes I get very disappointed by the fact that a lot of energy has been put into and defending the Sabbath day, but that's often been done in negative terms about what we shouldn't do and stuff like that.

And I find that disappointing because the truth is that a day of rest is an incredibly positive thing. It's an amazing thing to have as part of your weekly routine.

And so I can just imagine Adam and Eve working for six days and then resting on the Sabbath day and going around that garden, admiring the work that they've done and discovering more and more and more of God's amazing creation in this garden.

So God says to humanity, yes, I want you to work in this garden, but I also want you to enjoy it. And just imagine resting in the garden of Eden, just the environment, the beauty around you, the warmth, the security, the safety, the peace.

[25 : 04] What a brilliant resting place. And Adam and Eve had that because God wanted them to have it. God wants to bless us.

God wants to be good to us. That's an incredibly important theological point. That's what the character of God is. He is gracious.

He's kind. He's generous. He's extravagant in his goodness. He is so loving. He wants to pour out upon us the most extraordinary privileges.

His great desire was that humanity could rest and relax in this stunning garden because God is no slave driver.

He's a gentle and a kind God. A garden is a place of rest because God wants to be gentle with us and kind to us.

[26 : 02] Second last one, number seven, a garden is a place of joy. This garden was a place of joy. Again, as we think of it in our minds, we can just see the astonishing beauty of everything that is all around us.

All pointing us to the fact that a garden is a place of great joy. There's something so pleasant and happy and cheerful about being in a nice garden.

And for Adam and Eve, this place must have been a source of so much joy. They lived in these stunning surroundings. Adam had this amazing environment.

He had God's clear instructions for his life. He had a wife who was made for him. He had a routine that was healthy and purposeful and meaningful. He had all the nourishment and provision and protection that he needed.

And he must have thought, wow, this is good. This is so good. And we can still get a taste of that today.

[27 : 02] We can still see glory and beauty and splendor in the world around us. And some of us went on a hill walk yesterday for the weekend away.

And when you get to the top of a hill in Scotland and you look out, it's impossible not to say, wow, it's amazing. And that joy, if it's true now, boy, it must have been so true back in Eden.

It's reminding us of the fact that God wants us to have joy. He gave Adam and Eve the best, not just a good garden, not just, it was just brilliant.

He gave God the very best. And it's a reminder, God does not want us to be miserable. He wants to give humanity great joy.

A garden is a place of joy because God wants to give us joy. And the last one, number eight, is that a garden is a place of wonder, which I suppose is kind of a summary of everything that we've said.

[28 : 05] All that we've said and looked at tonight is coming together to remind us that Eden must have been a place of astounding wonder. The colors, the smells, the sounds, the safety, the routine, the joy, the scenery, everything must have been just astonishing.

It's a place of wonder. And that wonder points us to the one from whom it all came, as Vershe tells us, God planted that garden.

And like all of creation, from the stars to the hills to the flowers, it's all a revelation of the glory of God because He's the great artist.

He's the great architect. He's the great musician. He's the great provider. He's the great gardener. The glory of Eden is giving us a glimpse of the glory of God.

So that garden must have been an amazing place. It's a place of life, of beauty, of nourishment, of protection, of work, of rest, of joy, and of wonder.

[29 : 18] And that's teaching us about the glory and majesty and goodness of the God who planted it. And it's a great reminder that from the very beginning, God wants to give humanity the best.

Now, please make sure that you write that truth onto your heart because the devil has plagued humanity.

From Adam onwards, he has plagued humanity with the lie that God does not want what's best for us and that God's instruction and that God's purposes are actually spoiling our lives and restricting us.

And as a result, many, many people have abandoned God and they've gone headlong down a path of self-destruction.

Never ever, ever doubt that God wants to give you the best. But the last thing I want to say is this.

[30 : 33] At one level, when we think of Eden, it's amazing. But when we think of Eden, we could also find ourselves thinking of that garden with a sense of sorrow because we lost it.

Adam and Eve sinned and by the end of chapter 3, they've been expelled from the garden.

And all of that wonder that chapter 2 sets before us is lost by the time we get to the end of chapter 3.

But the astonishing truth of the gospel is that through faith in Jesus Christ, God wants to bring us back.

That's what the new heavens and the new earth are going to be. A restoration of creation back to what it was meant to be. In other words, back to the glory and splendor of Eden.

[31 : 49] Only it will be even better because now that Jesus has risen from the dead, the devil cannot touch us and no one can ever separate us from our Savior.

So if you're sitting here tonight as a Christian, you should not be thinking we've lost Eden. You should be thinking we're going back.

And that's confirmed to us on the cross and in something that Jesus said.

I'm going to break every rule in the book just now. You're supposed to never ever ever mention Greek in the pulpit, they say. Greek words like agape, not allowed.

I'm going to put a whole verse up. Now don't worry if you can't read it, it's okay. I just want you to listen because you can all listen and you can all hear it. So listen really carefully. I'm not an expert in Greek and I'm not pretending to be, but I can probably fumble my way through this verse.

[32 : 52] But I want you to listen really carefully. That says, amenssoi lego semeron metemu esse ento paradiso.

I bet there's one word you all know in that verse. And I'm sure you know what this is. This is Jesus speaking to the thief and he says, truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise.

Yeah? That's that word at the end, paradise. Now here's another Greek verse. This time it's the Greek translation of the verse that we've had as our text, Genesis 2.8.

Okay? And listen to this verse again really carefully. Cae effe tiusen curios hothaios paradisoen en edin.

And there's one word that's in both verses, isn't it? And I'm sure you know what it is. It's that word, paradise.

[34 : 00] Because when Jesus told the thief that he was going to be in paradise, he was promising him a return to the wonder and splendor of Eden.

The word paradise means garden. And so as we look forward to what God has for us, when we think of the promise that God wants to take us to paradise, it's a promise that he's going to take us back to all of that astounding beauty and wonder and security and joy of Eden.

That's where God wants you to be. And the utterly astonishing thing is that God the Son died to get you there.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

God our Father, we marvel at the work of your hands. We're so thankful that we can read about what Eden was like, about how amazing that garden was and what is really even more amazing is your promise to bring us back to paradise, to the new heavens and the new earth, which will be a restoration of this universe back to the perfection of what you always intended for it.

[35 : 59] And we just thank you so, so, so much that you are willing to be so good to us. Not only to provide us with so much, but also to sacrifice so much so that it could be ours.

We thank you for Jesus, our Savior who died and rose again, and the one who can now take us to be with you in paradise forever.

We thank you so much. Amen. Amen.