

God's Garden

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, tonight I'd like us to turn back to Genesis chapter 2 and in particular we can look at verse 8.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he put the man whom he had formed.

When we think back to the garden of Eden, we are thinking of many of the big, big events that took place when God created the world and when God created the human race.

Genesis chapters 1, 2 and 3 are really crucial chapters in terms of understanding the whole of the Bible and in terms of understanding the whole of life.

These chapters tell us about the origin of the world, about the creation of humanity, about the institution of marriage, about the setting apart of the Sabbath and of the mandate to go and fill the earth and rule over it.

[1 : 01] And of course in Genesis chapter 3 we read about the tragic fall of humanity when God's commandment was disobeyed.

The big, big themes that shape much of the rest of the Bible and indeed so much of life are set before us in these chapters.

And often these big themes can attract our attention when we come to these chapters. But tonight I want us actually to put these big themes to one side.

Not that they are not important, they are incredibly important. But there are other wonderful things to look at in these chapters as well.

And tonight I want us to focus on something very specific and that is I want us to think about the fact that when God created humanity he chose a particular environment in which to place the ones that he had made.

[2 : 02] And the environment that he chose to give them for their home was a garden. At the heart of the perfection of God's creation there was a garden.

But I want us to ask a simple question. What does that teach us about God? And I think there are at least eight things that we can highlight and that's what we're going to look at tonight.

Eight different things that we've been taught about God. So number one is a garden is a place of life.

I want you to imagine a vibrant garden in the height of summer. One thing that you can say for certain about that garden is that it is bursting with life.

You can think of the plants, the animals, the birds, they are full of vitality. A garden is a place of life. And if that's true of the gardens that we can imagine it must have been so spectacularly true of the garden that was in Eden.

[3 : 12] The trees, the plants, the wildlife, the bird life, the vegetation, that garden must have been so full of life.

And of course that is teaching us and reminding us that the source and the giver of life is God.

That is one of the great logical foundations of the biblical worldview. The fact that the Bible explains the reality of life on the basis of the reality of a giver of life.

God is the one who brings life into the creation. And the reason he can do that is because God has life in and of himself. He is self-sufficient. He's not in any way dependent on anything else.

He is altogether, in every way, he has life in and of himself. There's a phrase that sometimes used to describe that.

[4 : 14] It's called the Asseity of God. So if you're reading a book, sometimes you might hear writers mention the Asseity of God. It comes from the Latin phrase assi, which means from himself.

The idea that God has life not from anyone else, but from himself. God's power, God's strength, God's life is all contained and sourced within himself.

And because of that abundant self-sufficiency of God, he is able to give life to the creation. And so although God is independent, he is not introverted.

He has poured life into this creation. And that creative power has brought energy to the whole universe. It's brought life to planet Earth.

And in the vibrancy of this garden that we read about, we see all the amazing results of God's life-giving power. The Garden of Eden was full of life.

[5 : 19] And that is grounded in the fact that it was God who planted it. He is the source of life. He is the origin. He is the giver of life.

He is the creator. Now, of course, as the generations of history have passed, the development of the world of science has given us wonderful insights into how that life works.

And none of that should intimidate us as Christians. It should make us marvel all the more at what God has made. So as biologists tell us about how plants work, as astrophysicists tell us how the universe functions, all of that should make us marvel at the God who created it all.

And of course, that's the worldview that makes sense as far as I can see. Because one of the great anomalies of the modern world is that we accept the reality of life.

We value the experience of life. And yet the world seems quite happy to deny that there is a source of life.

[6 : 30] And I just cannot see how that makes sense. It just doesn't add up to me. The biblical worldview, on the other hand, makes perfect sense.

God has life in and of himself. It is his nature that 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 in Eden.

So a garden is a place of life. God made a garden because he is the giver of life. Number two, a garden is a place of beauty.

Go back in your mind to that vibrant garden in the height of summer. What can you see in your mind's eye? You can see flowers and plants and trees and fruit and colors and patterns, all of these glistening in warm sunshine, all of these swaying in a gentle breeze.

The whole environment is one of outstanding beauty. You go to a thriving garden and it's beautiful.

[7 : 50] And of course there can be absolutely no doubt that the beauty of this garden in Eden, it must have been breathtaking.

And Genesis makes that explicit. Verse nine says that, out of the garden a Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight.

Now I always remember every phrase that you see in the Bible is there for a reason. It's deliberately placed there. So the writer of Genesis wants you and me to know that this garden looked stunning.

It was pleasant to the sight. It's reinforced by the description of gold and onyx stones. Later on these precious stones that must have just looked so stunning.

It was a beautiful place. And that is teaching us that God likes to make things beautiful.

[8 : 49] And so the life that God creates is not just functional. It's not just clinical, pragmatic or formal. It's not just a machine.

God's creation is extraordinarily beautiful. Just imagine being in the garden of Eden and think of your five senses. So think of what you would see.

You would see the blossoming flowers. You would see the magnificent trees. You would see the lush ripe fruit. You would see the glistening water. You would see spectacular colors.

Think of what you would hear with your ears. You'd hear leaves rustling. You'd hear birds singing. You would hear water gently flowing. Think of what you would smell.

The delicate fragrance of the flowers, the freshness of the grass and the leaves. I love the smell of grass. It smells so nice. The clean, crisp air.

[9 : 46] And later on we read about bedelium. Bedelium was a fragrant aromatic resin. In other words, it was something that smells nice.

And so the writer wants us to know this place smelled nice. Think of what you would taste. I absolutely love fruit. My poor wife has to spend a fortune on fruit because I love it.

Just imagine what the fruit in Eden must have tasted like. Think of the juicy oranges, the ripe grapes, the soft pears, the succulent olives, the crisp apples, the sweet tomatoes, the strawberries.

Must have been so nice. And think of what you would touch, the delicate flower petals, the soft grass, the cool water, the strong branches of the trees, the smooth leaves, the tender plants.

Just think of your senses. What you would see, hear, smell, taste and touch. The beauty in that garden is mind-blowing.

[10 : 55] And it's a reminder that the greatest artists, the greatest musician, the greatest perfumer, the greatest flavorer, the greatest craftsman of all is God.

He makes beautiful sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. When God made a garden, it was stunningly beautiful.

And of course, we still enjoy much of that beauty today. We live here in a place of rare beauty.

And we should always be marvelling at God's creation around us. We were at Dalmore in the afternoon.

It was stunning. But yet that's in a way just a glimpse of what Eden must have been like.

[11 : 51] It's a great reminder that anybody who thinks that the God of the Bible is dull or stale or boring or lacking in imagination, then if anybody thinks like that, then they have a hopelessly and utterly inaccurate understanding of who God is.

The pinnacle of human art, the pinnacle of human music, the pinnacle of taste, all of these things are just a tiny reflection of the beauty that God is capable of.

God's beauty is at another level. So the Garden of Eden was beautiful because God makes things that are beautiful. Number three, the Garden was a place of nourishment.

Go back in your minds to the summer garden. It's a place of wonderful nourishment. The plants are watered by the rain. The soil provides them with nutrients. The sun gives light.

The birds and the animals can find food there. And we ourselves can go into a garden and we can eat from the fruit of the trees, from the harvest of the field. And Eden was the same.

[13 : 01] It was a place of wonderful nourishment. Verse nine tells us that with the final phrase, it was pleasant to the sight and good for food.

Therefore, the nourishment that humanity needed was provided by this wonderful garden. That reminds us of two great theological truths, the first that God is the great sustainer of His creation.

You look at the world, there is such an astounding balance of order and interdependence within the natural world where so many different things, light, sugar, minerals, soil, oxygen, carbon dioxide, weather conditions, all these things combine to sustain life.

God not only creates, he sustains the world that he's made. But secondly, it teaches us that God provides for our needs.

The reality of this garden meant that humanity had a perfect place to live. And that was simply because God had provided for it.

[14 : 13] It's such a wonderful reminder that God is concerned for your needs and for your nourishment. God is concerned for your health, for your well-being. Our bodies need a hugely complex range of nutrients in order to stay alive.

And in this garden, God provides them all. It's an amazing reminder of the kindness of God. He knows what we need, so He provides us a garden that will nourish and sustain humanity.

And I also want you just to notice that the nourishment that God provides is not just adequate. It's good. It's good.

We have a God who does not just give us the essential. He doesn't just provide the bare minimum. He wants us 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. Now, in our fallen condition, we can abuse that, which is why gluttony is a serious sin.

[15 : 22] It's prohibited in exactly the same way that drunkenness is to abuse the good things that God has given us. But if we avoid those pitfalls, we can enjoy the wonderful provision that God has given us in order to nourish us.

A lovely meal, which I'm sure you all had today, is to be enjoyed with wholehearted thanksgiving to God. A garden is a place of nourishment because God wants to meet our needs.

Fourthly, a garden is a place of protection. The Hebrew word for garden comes from the same word as the word for defend and the word for shield.

So you look at 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. I just want to highlight the fact that the two words there, underlined protect, come from the same root as the word for garden in the Hebrew language.

So a garden is a place of shelter, a place of protection, a place of safety. So when God made this garden for Adam and Eve, he was giving them a safe and secure place to live.

[16 : 40] And we can relate to that with our own gardens. I remember when I was wee growing up in Stornoway, when I was walking home at night, if it was dark, I was always a bit scared.

But when I got into my own garden, I felt safe. And thinking of Eden, you can imagine the security of being there. You can imagine sheltering under the trees.

You can imagine the safety of sitting by the riverbank in peace. It was a place of security. Now some of you may be immediately asking the question, well, how come the serpent got in?

And that's a fair question. But the point that you must recognise is that God had already given Adam everything that he needed to be safe from the serpent.

If you look at the narrative, and we read it through in chapter 2, God had given Adam dominion over all the creatures. Indeed, he's the one who names them. He's the one who's in charge of them because he has authority.

[17 : 40] So when this serpent comes up to Adam and tries to influence his behaviour, all Adam had to do was remember that God had placed him in charge.

And he was under no obligation whatsoever to do what the serpent told him. He should have exercised the authority that God gave him, and he should have told the serpent to clear off.

God had given him what he needed. God had given them everything they needed to be safe and secure. And the fall happened because they doubted God and doubted whether God really had their best interests at heart.

And one of the reasons why that is so tragic is that the creation of this garden was such a clear statement of how much God cared for them, and that God wanted them to be safe and wanted them to be comfortable, and yet they doubted that, and they listened to the serpent.

But God's great desire then was for his people to be safe, and God has not changed. And if you go through the rest of the Bible, you will discover that again and again and again, God provides things in order to protect his people.

[18 : 57] So he gives his people a law in order to protect them. He provides them with a king whose duty it is to defend his people. He sends prophets who come to warn the people, all because God wants his people to be safe.

And it's teaching us that God is a protective God. Jesus himself spoke of that when he expressed his earnest desire to gather Jerusalem like a hen gather her chicks under her wing.

Never ever forget that. Never forget that God wants you to be safe. Sometimes that means he tells us to avoid things that are harmful to us.

That is only because he is so deeply protective towards you. And yet so often, like Adam, 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 : 17] One of the great principles highlighted in the creation of the Garden of Eden is that a key part of God's original plan for humanity was that we would work.

We read 2 15, the Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. It's a reminder that although work is affected by the fall, it is not a consequence of the fall.

We were created originally to be active, to be busy, to be working to fulfil the role and responsibility that God has given us. And all of that is very, very applicable to a garden because any gardener in here will tell you that looking after a garden is a lot of work.

It involves work. And that was through of Eden as well. Eden needed to be worked and kept. That was a key part of Adam's job.

That work involves commitment and effort, but it also brings great reward. Many of you who have a nice garden are probably digging away just now and planting seeds and probably thinking, why do I do this?

[21 : 29] And yet come July when your garden's blooming, you'll be thinking, wow, this is so worthwhile. God has made us to work.

He's made us to work well, to work wisely, to work willingly. And the Garden of Eden was a wonderful environment in which to work, it brought routine and it brought purpose and it brought achievement to Adam and Eve's lives.

It's a great reminder that God does not like laziness. God himself is never lazy. And part of the way in which we bear the image of God is to make sure that we are not lazy either.

Now, the fall has ruined work for us. It ruined Adam's work. It made it a hard toil and sometimes our jobs are a hard, hard toil.

But the Garden of Eden is reminding us that back in the beginning, God's great plan was to give humanity a brilliant job, a stimulating, satisfying and rewarding role that brought purpose and fulfillment to life.

[22 : 40] 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.

The Garden of Eden, as we just said, was a place of work, but it was also a place of rest. And from the very beginning, the pattern of Sabbath rest was established by God. And you can see beautiful logic in all of this.

God has created this magnificent garden for Adam and Eve. He wants them to work in it and to look after it, but he also wants them to rest and to enjoy it.

It's a great reminder of what an incredibly positive thing the Sabbath principle is. Sometimes I get a wee bit frustrated that much of the defence of the Sabbath in our own context just now is expressed in negative terms because really the truth is the Sabbath Day is an incredibly positive thing, a wonderfully good thing that we can have in our weekly routine.

And I can just imagine Adam and Eve resting on the Sabbath Day and going round the Garden, admiring all the work that they had done in the previous week and seeing that blossom through the life that God has given to that garden.

[24 : 05] And as they go round, they can discover more and more and more of God's amazing creation. So God says to humanity, yes, I want you to work this garden, but I also want you to enjoy it and just imagine resting in the Garden of Eden.

How amazing must that have been the warm breeze, the beautiful flowers, the soft grass, the birds singing, the peace and quiet, what a place in which to rest.

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. Never ever forget that. It's an incredibly important theological point. Here we see the character of God.

He's gracious. He's kind. He's generous. He's extravagant in his goodness. He is so, so loving. He's given us the most extraordinary privileges. How is it that we can go down and go to a stunning beach like Dalmore and enjoy such splendor and beauty?

[25 : 31] That's because God wants you to have it and he wants you to enjoy it. His great desire was that humanity could rest and relax in this stunning garden because God is not a slave driver.

God is a gentle, kind God. The Garden was a place of rest because God wants to be gentle with us and to be kind to us.

Number seven, the Garden was a place of joy. Again I want you to go back in your minds to think about a beautiful garden. Think of the beauty, the peace, the splendor of your surroundings in that garden.

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

You see flowers that are almost smiling at you as they sparkle in the sun. It's a place of joy. And for Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden must have been a source of so much joy.

[26 : 45] Only for Adam, as we read about in these early verses, he lived in these stunning surroundings. 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 meaningful. He had all the nourishment, provision and protection he needed and he must, must surely have thought to himself, wow, this is good.

This is so good. And we still get a taste of that today. When we see the world around us in all its splendor, there's a wonderful joy.

There's a thrill that comes from that. Often we look at the world that God has created and we find ourselves saying, wow, how amazing is that?

And if that's true now, it must have been so true back in Eden. And the joy that a garden brings arises from the fact that God wants us to have joy.

[27 : 49] He gave Adam and Eve the very best. He didn't do that because he wanted them to be miserable. He did it because he wanted humanity to be full of joy.

A garden is a place of joy because God wants to give us joy. And last of all, number eight, a garden is a place of wonder.

All of the points that we've raised culminate to remind us that the garden of Eden must have been a place of astounding wonder.

It must have been amazing. The colors, the smells, the sound, the safety, the security, the routine, the joy, the scenery, everything was just a wonder, a place of astounding wonder.

And that wonder points us to the one from whom it all came, as Vershade says, God planted that garden.

[29 : 01] God made it all. And like all of creation, that garden was a revelation of the glory of God himself. It's a great principle the Bible sets before us, that the world around us is revealing the glory of God to us.

He is the great artist. He is the great architect. He's the great musician. He's the great provider. He is the great gardener.

The glory of Eden is giving us a glimpse of the glory of God.

So the garden of Eden must have been amazing. It was a place of life, a place of beauty, a place of nourishment, a place of protection, a place of work, a place of rest, a place of joy, a place of wonder.

And all of that is teaching us about the glory, the majesty and the goodness of the God who planted it.

[30 : 14] It's a great reminder that from the very beginning, God wants to give humanity the best. God wants to give humanity the best.

And please make sure that that truth is written in your heart, because the devil has plagued humanity with the lie that God does not want what's best for us.

And that's why people have abandoned God, and why people have gone heading down a path of self-destruction, because the devil has filled them with a lie that says, you'd better off without God.

God's just going to spoil your life or restrict your life. Please never, ever, ever doubt the fundamental biblical truth that God wants to give you the best.

It's what he gave Adam and Eve at the very beginning, and that's his desire for us all.

[31 : 17] So the Garden of Eden's amazing, you think about it, and really it's quite mind-blowing. But as we think about the Garden of Eden, on the one hand we have this sense of wonder and amazement, but on the other hand we can't avoid a sense of sorrow, because we lost it.

We can't go and see the Garden of Eden today. Adam and Eve sinned, they disobeyed God.

So the high point of Chapter 2 is immediately followed by the tragic low of Chapter 3, when God's command was disobeyed, and sin came into the experience of humanity.

The end result of that was that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. They lost it.

And so when we think of the Garden of Eden, you think, you know, that must have been amazing, but it's gone.

[32 : 35] The absolutely amazing message of the Bible is that through faith in Jesus Christ, God wants to bring us back.

And that's what the goal of Scripture is. That's what the new heavens and the new earth are going to be. Eden is not this sort of holy spiritual realm where there's just sort of vapours and clouds and whatever else.

That's not the goal of the scriptural message. The goal is a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, where the created world is restored back to what it was meant to be.

In other words, back to the glory and splendor of Eden. And then it will be even better because then through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the fact that he has conquered death and defeated sin, the devil cannot touch us and we will never, ever be separated from our Savior.

So if you are a Christian, you shouldn't just be thinking, we lost Eden. You should be thinking, we're going back.

[34 : 05] And that is confirmed for us on the cross. I'm going to put up on the screen the Greek phrase that records the words of Jesus on the cross when he spoke to the thief.

So I'm going to put it up there. Don't worry if you can't read it. I'm not a Greek expert at all. But I can read it a bit. But don't worry if you can't read it. I want you to listen to it.

Listen very, very carefully to the words. My pronunciation won't be perfect, but I'll do my best. Amen, soy lego.

So that's truly I say to you. Semeron met emu. That means today with me.

Ese ento paradiso. So I'm sure you recognize the last word. Amen, soy lego, semeron met emu, ese ento paradiso.

[35 : 10] Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. Now I am now going to put up the Greek translation of the Old Testament words of Genesis 2.8.

So this is the Greek. So the Old Testament was translated into Greek. This was really the commonly used scripture in the days of Jesus. It's called the Septuagint. Originally the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, but around I think between 200 BC or thereabouts it was translated into Greek.

And so many of the New Testament letters will quote the Septuagint because that was the common Bible that was used in many contexts at this time.

So listen to this one now. So I want you to listen carefully again. I'll read the first one again from Luke and then we'll read Genesis and listen to the word. Amen, soy lego, semeron met emu, ese ento paradiso.

In Genesis 2.8. Cae effut usen, curios fothios paradiso en iden.

[36 : 27] There's two words that are the same in both. Did you hear them? It's the word paradise.

It's the same word. The word, it's a word that comes from a Persian word meaning garden.

So when Jesus said to the thief on the cross, today you will be with me in paradise. He is pointing back to Eden, promising a return.

The Lord God made a paradise in Eden. Today you will be with me in paradise.

God wants to bring you back to the paradise of Eden. He wants to bring you back to that perfect place to live.

[37 : 28] And the utterly astonishing truth of the Gospel is that God the Son died to get you there.

He laid down his life so that he could take you to be with him in paradise.

So all the majesty and beauty and wonder of Eden is teaching us about everything that God has in store for you.

That's what God wants you to have and God the Son was willing to lay down his life to get you there.

What a God. What a God. Amen. Our Father, we thank you so, so much for the fact that you want to give us the best.

[38 : 42] Please forgive us for all the times that we have turned away from you and thought that we could do better on our own.

We can't even begin to say how foolish that is and yet we do it. Please forgive us Lord and help us all just to look to you.

Thank you O God for the beauty of your creation but thank you also God for the promise of the new creation.

We pray that each one of us would be there. Amen.