**IN BETWEEN TWO GARDENS**

**(Various Texts)**

Her name was Betty. Betty was a member of the church I pastored on Monkey Island. She and her husband were care-takers of White Chapel, a neighborhood development, that is situated on the western side of the Island. I often walked the circular road around White Chapel in the cool of the summer evenings. It was a beautiful place made more beautiful by the flowers Betty planted.

Everybody in the church knew not to plant anything until Betty planted because Betty knew when to plant, and more importantly, when not to plant. That is an important thing to know in Oklahoma where a late frost can kill the handiwork on an impatient gardener.

I once read a story about a wealthy homeowner who hired a horticulture specialist to plant a garden for him. She came to his house to sit down with him and find out just what it was he was looking for. They discussed several ideas. He added, “I want a garden that doesn’t need a lot of attention.”

The expert looked at the home owner and said, “I can plant a garden for you, but let’s be clear: If there is no gardener, there is no garden.”

As I read the pages of the Bible, I discover that God has a keen interest in gardens. As it turns out, God has a pretty green thumb. In fact, He is the original, Master Gardener. The second chapter of the first book of the Bible tells us about a particular garden that God planted.

Look with me at Genesis 2:8-10, 15. God planted the first garden. He made it grow with luscious, fruit-bearing trees. God knew that without a gardener there is no garden, so He took the man He had created and gave him a job. He put Adam in the garden to tend it. Later, he gave the man a wife who was to help him.

As you know, Genesis 3 is where the story takes a tragic turn. Both Adam and his wife, Eve, eat from the tree God had put off limits. They disobeyed Him, and because they did, they were forced to leave the garden and were not allowed to return. They had to change vocations. Instead of being the gardeners of a lush garden, they became farmers of the cursed ground. God told Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you . . . thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (3:17-19).

Both the Bible and human history begin in a garden. Consider how the Bible ends. The last three chapters of the Bible, Revelation 20-22 reverse the story of the first three chapters.

**Genesis**

1. Heaven and earth created.
2. Satan enters the scene.
3. Paradise lost.
4. Man driven from the Tree of Life.
5. First tears shed.
6. Sentence of death.
7. Marriage of Adam and Eve.

**Revelation**

1. Heaven and earth re-created.
2. Satan exits the scene.
3. Paradise regained.
4. Man invited to the Tree of Life.
5. God wipes all tears.
6. No more death.
7. Marriage of Jesus and His Church.

The comparisons & contrasts between first three chapters of the Bible and the last three of the NT are dramatic. The most stunning one to me is that there are two gardens—one at the beginning of the human race and one that becomes the eternal home of the redeemed.

You and I live between two gardens, between the garden that was and the garden that will be. There are a couple of truths I want to impress upon you. The first truth will touch on the nature of this garden to which we are headed. The second truth will focus on what Jesus did in between the two gardens.

1. **HEAVEN IS OUR ETERNAL HOME.**

Look with me at Revelation 21:1-4. When we think of going to heaven, we envision going up to be where God is, wherever that might be. What I want you to catch is that when we are living eternally with God, we will not be residing with Him where He is. Rather, He will come to be with us where we are. Look again at vv. 2-3.

Both the Old and New Testament teach there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Let me draw a distinction between the present heaven which is temporary and a future heaven which is eternal.

I believe that when a believer dies, he or she goes to be with God in heaven. I also believe the Bible teaches that sometime after Jesus returns, God will bring into being a new heaven. Now that word *heaven* doesn’t refer to the place of God’s abode. It refers to the starry host, to the heavenly bodies—sun, moon, stars, etc. And God will bring into being a new Earth.

The age-old question has been: “Will God replace the heavens and the earth or will God redeem the present heavens and earth?” It is a question that is not easily answered because in my view the Bible is not crystal clear.

When you read what Peter writes in 2 Peter 3, you get the idea that this earth is going to be incinerated in a great fire, and God will start all over. I don’t think that is a correct reading of that passage, and I don’t think that squares with how I read other passages.

First, there two different words the Greek NT uses for the word *new.* One word means brand-spanking new. It has never before existed. It is new in time. For instance, in Matthew 9:17 we looked at the saying not to put new wine in old wineskins. It means *recent* wine, *fresh* wine.

But the other word for *new* means not new in time but new in quality or a new nature. Jesus used that word when He told the disciples He was giving them a new commandment to love one another. Paul used the word saying that in Christ we are a new creation and that we are to put on the new man or the new nature.

John did not say God created a new earth that had never existed before. When God re-creates the world, it will be qualitatively different from the world we now know. It will be a world without sin, without defilement.

There will be fire that cleanses this earth just as fire purifies silver, separating the precious metal from the dross. The fire will not completely consume the earth; it will purify the earth. The new earth will be new but not completely unrecognizable.

The New Jerusalem, heaven, will come to this earth. We will live with God forever on this new earth. That is the teaching of Scripture.

In her book, *The Vision of His Glory,* Anne Graham Lotz writes:

In this brand-new home there will be no more death

or pain

or hospitals

or funerals

or grief

or broken homes

or broken hearts

or broken lives

or broken dreams.

There will be no more mental retardation

or physical handicaps

or muscular dystrophy

or multiple sclerosis

or blindness

or lameness

or deafness.

Heaven will be perfect in its quality of life, not only because the life of Christ is lived out in redeemed men and women for all eternity, but because He is the center of it! Heaven is not only our home, it is *His* home! He is not only preparing this place as a heavenly home for you and me, but as a heavenly home for Himself!

We will live with Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ will live with us! We will live with each other! Forever!

Eden will be restored and redeemed. Just as your body will be resurrected when Jesus returns, this Earth will be resurrected, too. It will become what it was meant to be before the Fall because when humanity fell due to the sin of Adam and Eve, so did creation. Creation longs for its redemption, not for its destruction. One day this creation will be redeemed and restored, as we will be.

When I stand at the bedside of elderly believers who are sick and dying, sometimes they express to me that they want to, “Go home.” They are not speaking of a physical address nor a home they once knew. They are speaking of their heavenly home.

One day that heavenly home come to rest on a resurrected earth. Just think of it. Randy Alcorn wrote, “To be in resurrected bodies on a resurrected Earth in resurrected friendships, enjoying a resurrected culture with the resurrected Jesus—now *that* will be the ultimate party!” Let me add, I believe *that* will be the ultimate home. We long for out eternal home.

All of that is made possible because of what Jesus did—what He did between the two gardens—the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Heaven.

While heaven is our eternal home, we come to a second truth that is even more glorious.

1. **JESUS IS OUR ETERNAL SAVIOR.**

In between the two Gardens we have been talking about, there just happened to be two other gardens in which Jesus acted on our behalf. All four gospel writers have something to say about those gardens. We read in John 18:1, “Jesus . . . went out with His disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.” Luke gives us the general area, the Mount of Olives (Luke 22) while Matthew and Mark give us the name of the place they went—Gethsemane (Matthew 26 & Mark 14).

The word *Gethsemane* is made up of two Hebrew words that mean “oil press.” It was a place the olives were pressed or crushed and the oil from those olives was collected. The olives were placed in a circular trough and a heavy millstone, a large stone wheel would crush and grind those olives and the oil that flowed was collected. That was the extra virgin oil. Then, the crushed olives were placed in bags and put under a heavy press until every drop of oil was pressed out of them.

So, really, the Gethsemane was not a garden. It was an olive press, but next to the olive press there was likely an olive garden or an olive grove.

After having observed the Passover with His disciples, Jesus and the apostles travelled to that olive grove. Let’s read Mark’s account—Mark 14:32-34. The New Living Translation says, “He began to be filled with horror and deep distress.” It translates the words of Jesus as, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of the death.”

So, next to the place where olives were crushed by an olive press, the soul of Jesus was being crushed by the weight of what He was about to experience.

Jesus expressed what He was feeling to His Father. Look at Mark 14:35-36. He called it a cup of suffering. In His humanness, Jesus did not want to face and experience the pain, the agony, and the humiliation that accompanied dying on a Roman cross. He was crying out to God, “If there is some other way to achieve the salvation of those You have chosen, let this cup pass from me. I don’t want to do this. Isn’t there some other way? Father, isn’t there some other path to their forgiveness and salvation? But if there is not, I will do what You want. I will drink from this cup of wrath and suffering.”

And He did. He drank every drop for you and me.

**In a Garden, Jesus Suffered for Us.**

Let me give you a take away. There are some parallels between Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve was oblivious to the fact she was being tempted. Jesus, however, warns His disciples to watch and pray so that the do not enter into temptation (14:38). What did Eve do? She talked to the Tempter. What did Jesus do? He talked to His Father.

When you find yourself being tempted, don’t talk to the tempter. He’s a liar; he’s a cheat; he wants nothing more than your complete destruction. You can’t reason with him or negotiate or outwit him. He’s got a lot more experience than you do, and he’s not going to play fair. Don’t talk to the tempter. Talk to the Father. Look to Him. Commit yourself to His will regardless the cost because the ultimate cost of disobedience is always far greater than the cost of obedience.

There is a second truth. Look with me at John 19:41.

This tells me, **Next to a Garden, Jesus Died for Us.** We often visualize Jesus dying up on a hill. We sing, “On a hill far away stood an old, rugged cross.” The truth of the matter is that nowhere in the Bible does it say that Jesus died on a hill. If Jesus didn’t die on a hill, where did He die? He died on the side of a heavily traveled road. The Romans always crucified people in a public spot, usually a roadside. It was a warning: “Take heed. This is what happens to those who would dare defy Rome.”

Just around the corner from where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. I have been to that garden. In that garden there is an ancient press and a cistern. It, too, could have been an olive grove or maybe a vineyard.

Next, to that garden, Jesus died on a cross. Why did Jesus die on the cross? Look with me at 2 Peter 2:24. He died so that we would die to sin and live a righteous life. Unlike our Pentecostal friends, I do not take this “healing” to mean physical healing. One reason I don’t is because of what Peter goes on to say in v. 25. He healed us because we were straying from Him, not because our cholesterol count was too high. He is the Overseer of our soul. Peter is using spiritual terms not physical or medical ones.

Jesus died. He wasn’t playing acting. He wasn’t playing possum.

There is a lady I go see every couple of weeks in a nursing home. She is almost always asleep when I arrive. I always knock on her door, walk in, and call her name as I approach her bed. More than once, she has opened her eyes, saw who it was and immediately closed them again pretending to be asleep.

Jesus didn’t pretend that He was dead. He literally, physically expired. His lungs quit respirating. His heart quit beating. His brain quit functioning. The hands that had touched so many were stilled. The eyes that looked with compassion upon the multitudes were unseeing. The mouth that announced the Kingdom of God was silenced.

Back in the 1800’s a German theologian came up with what has been called “the swoon theory” to explain away the idea that Jesus died on the cross and then physically rose again. The swoon theory states that Jesus fainted on the cross due to the loss of blood, that He was mistaken for dead, and that in the cool confines of the tomb He revived; He didn’t really die.

That theory explained a letter that Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee once received from woman. She wrote, “Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross, and the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?”

McGee wrote back, “Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for thirty-nine heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens.”

What is the takeaway? Jesus died for us; we are to live for Him.

That brings me to the final thought. Not only did Jesus suffer for us in a garden and die for us next to a garden, but also **In a Garden, Jesus Rose for Us.** Let’s look at that verse I mentioned earlier—John 19:41-42. I will talk about the resurrection in two weeks on Easter; so, I won’t belabor this point now, but notice what follows. The next verse is the next chapter. Mary Magdalene shows up early on Sunday morning at the tomb of Jesus. She notices that the large stone that sealed the entrance to Jesus’ tomb has been rolled away. She runs and finds Peter and John. They hurry to the tomb. John gets their first. He stops at the entrance and cautiously peers inside. Then, Peter arrives huffing and puffing, and in keeping with his character, he barrels right in to inspect it. They find the tomb empty except for the burial cloths.

The disciples leave. Mary stays. She is distraught. She is crying. Let’s pick up in v. 14 and read through v. 18.

Here is the takeaway: Now that we know that Jesus is alive, we need to go tell somebody.

Let me put the message of this sermon into one sentence: In between the two Gardens—the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Heaven—God waged and won a war. He fought a war against Satan, and He fought the war on our behalf.

Earlier we read some of the last words on the Book of Revelation. We are going to close by reading some of the first words of that book. Look at wat John writes in Revelation 1:17-18. Notice also Revelation 5:9-10, 11-12.

Consider the story of Samuel S. Scull. He lives on a farm in Arizona with his wife and children. One night, a fierce storm hit his farm. There was rain, hail, and terribly high wind. As day broke, Samuel ventured out to survey the damage. His garden had been beaten into the ground. The storm tore part of the roof from atop the house. The henhouse had blown away. Dead chickens were all scattered about. Everywhere he looked, there was destruction and devastation.

As Samuel stood there taking in the scene, he heard a stirring sound coming from the pile of lumber that had once been the hen house. A rooster made his way out from under all that debris. The rooster proceeded to climb his way to the top of that lumber pile. He positioned himself on the highest board. Then, dripping wet, with most of his feathers blown away, that bony rooster flapped his bony wings, and as the sun began to makes it way up and over the horizon, that rooster crowed for all he was worth.

I don’t know what storms you have encountered lately or what storms you will face in the future. But I do know this, the sun will continue to rise each morning. As it does, pick yourself up and sing the Lord’s praises because He waged and won a war for us between two gardens.