

Introduction

Las Vegas has gained a number of nick-names over the years like "Glitter Gulch" and the city of "Lost Wages." Probably it is most popularly known as "Sin City." Vegas is the place people go to do things they would not normally do in their hometown. For that reason it is often said, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

Grandparents are known for occasional instances of leniency with their grandkids. We just don't have to be as strict with our grandchildren, after all. When we are done with the spoiling, we can send the grandchildren home. So we have modified the saying about Vegas for our own purposes. "What happens at Honey Gram's and Grandad's stays at Honey Gram's and Grandad's." But we all know you can't keep it that way. The truth will come out eventually, especially when it involves grandkids.

But while there are some things we are reluctant to tell, there are other things we can't keep from telling. What we celebrate this morning is one of those things we can't keep from telling, and we must not keep from telling. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Christos aneste! Alethos aneste! This morning I want us to turn our attention to a particular location, the location where it happened, the place where the tomb was from which Christ arose. It was in a garden. The gospel according to John will not let us escape this fact. So look for that as we read John's account of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

[Read Text and Pray]

What happens in the garden cannot stay in the garden! The news must be told. It must be proclaimed to the world. In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb. It was there that Jesus died. It was there from the tomb in the garden that Jesus arose. It was there that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and she thought he might be the gardener. This morning I want you to see the significance of the garden with respect to Jesus' death and resurrection.

The first thing we need to do is to engage in a bit of biblical theology. We are going to need to survey the scriptures thematically. You see, we might well wonder if there is special significance to the fact that John highlights the garden in reporting Christ's death and resurrection. And I am going to show you that there is.

I. The Garden as a Place for Worship and Communion

Our first encounter in the Bible with the concept of a garden occurs in Genesis 2. We should read verses 7-9 and 15-17.

then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

So when God made the man, he also planted a garden especially for him. In the midst of the garden were two trees of distinction—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Verses 10-14 tell us of a river that flowed out of Eden watering the garden and dividing into four. The man's occupation was to work and keep the garden, to enjoy its bounty, and to refrain from the one tree that was forbidden. If he ate of that tree, all the goodness of the garden would come to a halt. He would die. It was in this garden that the Lord spoke with the man and gave him commands. It was here that the Lord himself would walk with the man and the woman whom he also put in the garden with the man.

A number of aspects of the garden demonstrate that it was a sacred place. Significant details of the garden parallel those of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament. The first and most obvious is the presence of God. The expression of his walking in the garden is repeated as his walking among the people of Israel. Second, the responsibility of Adam in the garden was to work and keep the garden. The same Hebrew words describe the responsibility of the priests in the tabernacle. They were to work and keep the furnishings of the tent of meeting. Third, in the center of the garden was the tree of life. In the midst of the tent of meeting was the tree-like figure of the menorah. Fourth, the entrance to the garden was to the east. Likewise, the entrance to the tent of meeting and later the temple was in the same direction.

Fifth, there are the cherubim. When Adam was expelled from the garden, the Lord God placed cherubim at its entrance to guard man from the holy place where the tree of life was. When it came to the tent and to the temple, cherubim figured prominently. They were stationed atop the ark of the covenant. They were embroidered on the curtains of the veil to the holy of holies. The description of the temple in 1 Kings 6 indicates that cherubim were featured in the inner sanctuary. Moreover, engraved into the walls of the house were figures of cherubim along with palm trees and flowers, seeming to depict a garden. Finally, Eden appears to be elevated since a river flowed from there to the four different directions. Likewise, Mt Zion is said to be beautiful in elevation. Moreover, scriptural depictions speak of a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

The significance to which each of these aspects point is that the garden from the beginning depicts a holy sanctuary of worship and communion with God. Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve had communion with God in an extraordinary way. The garden should be thought of as a sanctuary, a glorious and holy temple-dwelling possessing the promise of eternal life in a place permeated by the presence of God.

What the garden was is communicated through the tent of meeting and the temple and ultimately in Christ himself. And when we look to the book of Revelation, we find much in common with what we have observed thus far. There is the presence of God, the cherubim, and a new heaven and a new earth. There is a new Jerusalem with a river of life flowing through the middle of the street and either side of the river is the tree of life. And the presence of God permeates it all. The garden is the place of the presence of God meant for the worship of God and communion with God.

With a grasp of what the garden theme suggests, let's look at two gardens, one at a time. Next, let's consider

II. The Garden Where Worship Was Destroyed.

A. Eden was a paradise, but it possessed the potential for catastrophe since there was a forbidden tree in its midst. Life flourished and communion with God was sweet so long as the man, Adam, obeyed the command of God not to eat of that tree and so long as he guarded the garden appropriately. We all know what took place. The serpent deceived the woman to doubt the word of God and disobey his clear command. She ate of the forbidden fruit and gave some to her husband with her and he ate. It was sin. It was direct disobedience of their Creator and Sustainer and Benefactor and Lord. They broke the law of God.

The results were cataclysmic. They had been warned they would die, and die they did. They still breathed but their hearts and minds were darkened. When they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid from him. When God subjected them to judgment, he drove them out of the Garden. He expelled them from their intimacy with him. They were alienated from God. When God called them to account, the man blamed the woman and God. The woman blamed the serpent. They were corrupted in their thinking. They were subject now to pain and distress, laborious and "sweat-some" toil for him and pain in child-bearing for her. They were cursed. Dead spiritually, they were ultimately subject to death, physically being cut off now from the tree of life.

Adam was a poor gardener. He failed to properly work and guard the garden. And now he was thrown out of it. The results went far further than for just him and Eve. The entirety of their descendants were affected. Along with sin came death for all men because in the act of Adam, their representative, all sinned. The many died through the one man's trespass. One sin led to condemnation for all human beings. One man's disobedience made his descendants sinners. By nature we are children of wrath— alienated from God, cursed, condemned, corrupted in understanding, polluted in deed, and dead toward God.

The worship of God and communion with God were destroyed. With a love of self and of the world, we worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. Apart from grace we grow more greatly sinful by the day. And God justly gives human beings over in the lusts of their hearts to all sorts of impurity, to a debased mind, to be dominated satanically, debilitated morally, and dead spiritually. We had it oh so good. But it turned oh so bad. It couldn't be worse.

What happened in the Garden cannot be kept in the garden. When God sent Adam and Eve away from the Garden, the world became their playground. The world became the setting for all sorts of uncleanness. The world became the container of multiplied counts of defiance and decadent disobedience against God. Adam and Eve were meant to multiply and fill the earth with God's glory. Instead they have filled the earth with sin and death. None is righteous no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is NO fear of God before their eyes.

And nothing that depends on humanity can repair the situation. A trail of human failure litters the pages of the scripture. God flooded away the wicked, but as soon as the waters receded Noah planted his own garden, harvested grapes, made wine, and got drunk. God chose a faithful man,

Abraham, to start a holy nation, but he sinned and so did his descendants. God rescued those people from tyranny and brought them to their own garden—the luscious land of Canaan. But they defied him countless times. He gave them his law. They broke it. He gave them a sanctuary. They defiled it. He gave them the king they wanted. He was a disaster. He gave them his kind of king, but he sinned as well.

Over and over God offered help to restore worship and communion, yet God's people continued in sin in the steps of their forefather Adam. New beginnings and new gardens changed nothing. It was all because the garden God gave for worship and communion with him was desecrated by disobedience, and death came in as was threatened. The first garden stresses to us that what depends on man is powerless to maintain or restore acceptable worship and intimate communion with God. I should say it again. The first garden stresses to us that what depends on man is powerless to maintain or restore acceptable worship and intimate communion with God.

So, then, let us consider a second garden. It is a garden without a name but ... it is ...

III. The Garden Where Worship Was Restored

This is the garden about which we have read this morning. This garden was near the cross upon which Jesus was crucified. This garden had a new tomb. It was this tomb into which the body of Jesus was laid before the stone was rolled in place to cover the opening. This was the slain body of the Son of God, who is God the Son, in whom was no sin but who had died by crucifixion, suffering in the place of sinners. This is the garden where soldiers had been stationed to make sure no disciples came to steal the body. After Jesus' resurrection, they were bribed to lie and say they fell asleep while the disciples stole the body.

This garden is where Mary came early on Sunday morning while it was still dark. This garden is where she saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples. They came to the garden tomb and returned home. This is the garden where Mary lingered weeping and wondering who had taken the body and where they had put it. This garden is where she stooped to look into the tomb and saw two angels. Here she turned around to see Jesus but thought he must be the gardener. Here is where Jesus called her name, "Mary." She finally realized that he was in fact Jesus. She clutched him seemingly as if not to let him go. But what happened in the garden cannot stay in the garden. He told her to go and tell his disciples that he was ascending. Here is where Mary saw the risen Lord.

Here is where the death that occurred in the first garden was overturned. That is because this work was undertaken and completed by God himself from beginning to end. God sent his own Son. He alone could pay the penalty for sin, cleanse from the pollution of sin, and defeat death for his people.

Let's put facts about these two gardens back-to-back with one another. Then, it was a woman to whom the serpent spoke, leading her astray. Here it was a woman to whom the Lord spoke to solidify her faith.

In the garden of Eden, temptation led to deception, deception to sin, and sin to death and sorrow. Weeping began. At the tomb of the garden, weeping ceased. Sorrow and death and sin were overturned by the truth and life and joy.

In the garden of Eden, faulty thinking led to sin and sorrow. You will be like God. In the garden of the tomb, faulty thinking kept the woman trapped in sorrow and weeping. Jesus dispelled the faulty thinking. No one had taken his body. He was alive!

In the garden of Eden, the way to God was closed. Death won the day in the garden of the tomb, the way to God was opened. Risen life vanquished death.

In the garden of Eden there was no tomb but there was death. In the garden of the tomb, there was a tomb, but there death was swallowed up by life.

In the garden of Eden human beings were plunged into sin and death in Adam. In the garden of the tomb, human beings were redeemed from sin and brought to life in Christ.

We should not only compare gardens but also gardeners. Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener, but the mention of it is not without significance. For Jesus was the second Adam. And he is the superior gardener. The first Adam was placed in a garden full of life but through his action he brought forth death. He entered the garden much alive but left spiritually dead.

The second Adam was placed in a garden container of death, but through his actions he brought life. The second Adam entered the garden very much dead but left it spiritually and physically alive.

We should also think about the women. Eve was the first to sin. Mary was the first to see Jesus alive. Eve led her husband in the ways of Satan. Mary will speak to the men about the ascent of Jesus.

Now think of the reversals which are born out in Jesus's encounter with Mary. Hiding was turned to seeking. Alienation was turned into greeting. Death was turned to life. Corrupt thinking was turned into truth. A departure from the garden was not in despair but in hope. Jesus is alive and he is ascending to the Father. And His Father is our Father if we are of faith in Him! Why is he ascending? To send the Spirit! To prepare a place so that where he is there his people might be also. To be exalted at the right hand of the Father! To live as an intercessor for us!

Conclusion

What happens in the garden cannot stay in the garden. The sin in the garden did not stay in the garden. It went to the world. The message of the failure of the first Adam there must be known. People think we are basically good. They think we deserve good things. They think it is good to love ourselves. They think our bad isn't so bad. They are wrong. And they need to know.

When people are confronted with their sin, they don't like it, but realizing we are sinners in Adam is the first step toward reconciliation with God. God gave the law so that we could see that what we need is not to be better people. Better corruption is still corruption. We need to tell folks the implication of the sin in the garden of Eden. We are all sinners. We are all wicked. We are all alienated from God. We are all corrupt in our thoughts, words, deeds, and motives. We all deserve his wrath.

But what happened in another garden cannot stay there either. Sin and death came into the world through one man but so did righteousness and peace and life. The grace of God and the free gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounds for many. The free gift brings justification and reconciliation. It is counted to us as righteousness who believe in God who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our transgressions. He was crucified and bore the sinner's curse and was raised for their justification. For if because of the one man's trespass death reigned through the one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Mary was seemingly clutching on to Jesus as if to not let him get away from her. What he said to Mary stresses the fact that she will not be able to keep him from ascending. He will ascend and she needs to prepare herself for the fact that though he is risen, he will nevertheless be soon departing to be at the Father's side. But that is ultimately not bad news. He went to prepare a place so that those who belong to him through faith may also go be with him where he is. It will be a garden like no other—a sanctuary far better than the garden of Eden because of the victory won in the garden of the tomb.

The most important question for every person in this room is this: "do you belong to the risen Christ?" Have you turned from yourself, your works, your efforts, your sins, to trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ? If not, there's no better time than right now to do just that! If you are resting in Jesus Christ alone, then you have every reason to rejoice, every reason to stand in awe of the great work of God accomplished through the death and resurrection of his Son for you and me! Sometimes I feel like shouting glory; and this is one. Glory!