

The Garden Genesis 2:8-17

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I. A Garden

1) God's Garden: Text emphasises that this garden was an act of God's doing. God had antic-anticipated human need. He always does. Ezekiel 28:13 refers to 'Eden, the garden of God'. It is his handiwork, he is the first gardener, and he is actively engaged in it: later in 3:8 we read of 'the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden'. That rather suggests a habitual practice. The Bible in its understanding of God combines the transcendence of God, infinitely greater than our minds can grasp, with the immanence of God, the God who engages with us where we are.

2) Real Place: 'a garden in the east' v8, east of Israel 'in Eden' v8: the very first part of the earth to be named in Scripture. In v10-14 we find a cluster of 8 names of rivers/lands. We are clearly intended to understand by this a real location in a real world for real people. Place matters: God has made man to live in a prepared place. True previous to the Fall & that is true in eternity future. We are bound up with the physical world, 'formed from the dust of the ground' v7: when man & woman fall into sin, as Gen 3 shows, the very creation is affected too. The journey of the Bible is from one unspoiled place designed by God for man, at beginning of Genesis, to another unspoiled place, designed by God for man, at the end of Revelation. Jesus said to his disciples 'I am going to prepare a place for you' John 14:3. Both places are utterly real.

3) Lovely provision: name Eden means 'delight'. Here was thought, care, order, excellence, beauty, even in an unfallen world the garden is distinct from the rest of the lovely world God had made. We have only the record of that perfection: we have never seen creation as God meant it to be. And today in our dislocated world, where Genesis 3 stands as a huge chasm between us & that garden, our hearts ache for such a place: Bible is written to assure us that one day, in the glory that Christ makes possible, that ache will be satisfied fully.

II. Trees

There is no mistaking the emphasis on trees in this garden (see v9). Here there is *multiplicity*: 'the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground'. Even now are 100,000 known species of trees. There is *beauty*: 'trees that were pleasing to the eye' v9 (also 3:6). Whether it is the sunlight playing on the leaves or snow laden on the branches, there is still something lovely about trees. Even in our fallen world there is majesty in a great tree. It's Biblical to dwell on and delight in the sheer excellence of trees that God has made. There is *provision* for us: 'good for food'. The trees were laden with the most succulent & varied fruit. They are lovely but they are also useful. They serve a purpose for man's benefit. They are also useful in other ways, for fires, furniture & buildings. There is *mystery* here as well: without

explanation, introduction or elaboration we read at end of v9 of 'the tree of life & the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' at the centre of the garden. Don't think we should imagine these were trees with magical fruit, but that somehow God had invested special significance in these two trees. He tied promises and warnings to them. There is clearly something remarkable & significant about trees in God's world. And one day Peter will write of the Saviour of the spoiled world 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sins and live for righteousness' 1 Pet 2:24.

III. Rivers

v10-14 are largely about rivers. There is a river 'watering the garden' v10. It *sustains the life* of all that grows in the garden: gardens need water. The trees need the water, man needs the trees, the garden, as we shall see, needs the man. And all of it comes from God. The river divides into four & each are named: the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates. They are also *geographical markers*: quite important in a world without maps & signed place names: the rivers flow through, skirt and define different lands and areas. And beyond the garden there are huge resources that God has put in the earth to be discovered, gold (very good gold), resin (possibly pearls) and and onyx. We ought to have some sense of awe and respect for the remarkable environment God has created for man. Christians ought to be at the forefront of saying this world is a precious place and we ought to treat it with respect and care. Trees matter, should be indiscriminately cut down, rivers matter, they should not become polluted sewers of waste and chemicals; the earth matters because it belongs to God who made it for us to live in.

IV. Man

The most astonishing phenomenon of all is man.

1) Man is given a task: v15 'put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'. The two verbs are rich ones: to 'work' means to serve: 'take care of' means to keep watch over & guard. Even in an unfallen world man is given work. There is a dignity & importance about work. But work, by which I don't necessarily mean salaried work, but a task to do, which might be with children or at home, is intrinsic to how God has made us. God gave man a job. And here it is physical work. Society tends to value certain sort of work, often non-physical work as bearing higher status, better paid & better esteemed. That is not Biblical thinking. Man was given a physical job: Jesus was a carpenter. Work matters.

2) Man was given God's word: v16 'And the LORD God commanded the man'. God did not just make man & make the garden. God's word directs man how to live in the world God has made. Man is not just left to guess, or find his own way. That is still true. Why we have a Bible open before us this morning, because we will not know how to think & live in God's world without God's word. This is God's word & we should not be unashamed of putting central what God has put central. The whole world was made simply by God's word, it is sustained by God's word & Jesus says we live by God's word. God's word was central in the Garden. God's word will be central in heaven. Never be ashamed of putting God's Word at the centre of your life & of our church.