

## The Garden of the Lord

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A garden enclosed is my sister, [my] spouse;  
A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.  
Thy shoots are a paradise of pomegranates, with precious fruits;  
Henna with spikenard plants;  
Spikenard and saffron;  
Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense  
Myrrh and aloes, with ail the chief spices:  
A fountain in the gardens,  
A well of living waters  
Which stream from Lebanon.  
Awake, north wind, and come, [thou] south;  
Blow upon my garden, [that] the spices thereof may flow forth.  
Let my beloved come into his garden,  
And eat its precious fruits.  
I am come into my garden, my sister, [my] spouse;  
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;  
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;  
I have drunk my wine with my milk.  
Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, beloved ones!  
(Song of Songs 4: 12 - 5: 1).

With these choice words from the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom likens His bride to a garden of delights. Probably, all believers, with hearts opened to understand the Scriptures, would agree that in the Bridegroom, or the "Beloved", of the Song of Songs, we have a beautiful figure of Christ. Most would also concede that, in the interpretation of the Song, the bride sets forth Christ's earthly people.

While, however, the strict interpretation of the bride has Christ's earthly people in view, we are surely warranted in making an application to the Church, the heavenly bride of Christ.

Furthermore, if we may discover in this garden the excellencies that Christ would find in His heavenly bride, do we not at the same time learn what the love of Christ is looking for *in the hearts* of those who compose the bride? May we then, for a little, meditate upon this garden, with its spring, its fruit, its spices, and its living waters, as describing what the Lord would have our hearts to be for Himself.

First, we notice that the Bridegroom always speaks of the garden as "My garden"; while the bride delights to own it is "His garden". "Awake O north wind . . . blow upon My garden," says the

Bridegroom. The bride replies, "Let my Beloved come into *His* garden." In response, the Bridegroom says, "I am come into My garden." The application is plain — the Lord claims our hearts for Himself. "My son, give Me thine heart," says the Preacher (Prov. 23: 26). "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," is the exhortation of an Apostle (1 Peter 3: 15): and again, another Apostle can pray that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3: 17).

It is not simply our time, our means, our brains, and our busy service, that the Lord desires, but first, and above all, He claims our affections. We may give all our goods to the poor, and our bodies to be burned, but, without love it will profit nothing. The Lord is still saying to us, "Give Me shine heart."

"Thou hast left thy first love", was a solemn word indicating that whatever excellencies belonged to the believers thus addressed, their hearts had ceased to be a garden for the Lord. As one has said, "A wife may take care of the house, and fulfil all her duties so as to leave nothing undone for which her husband could find fault; but if her love for him has diminished, will all her service satisfy him if his love to her be the same as at first?" (J.N.D.).

Above all, then, the Lord claims the undivided affection of our hearts. The garden must be His garden. Moreover, if the Lord claims our hearts to be a garden for His delight, they must have the marks of the garden that is according to His mind.

As we read this beautiful description of the garden of the Lord, we note five outstanding features which set forth in figure what the Lord would have our hearts to be for Himself. First, the garden of the Lord is an *enclosed* garden. Secondly, it is a *watered* garden, with its spring shut up and its fountain sealed. Thirdly, it is a *fruitful* garden — a paradise of pomegranates with precious fruits. Fourthly, it is a *fragrant* garden, with trees of frankincense, and all the chief spices. Lastly, it is a *refreshing* garden from whence "the living waters" flow, and the fragrance of its spices is carried to the world around.

*The garden enclosed.* If the heart is to be kept as a garden for the pleasure of the Lord, it must be as "a garden enclosed." This speaks of a heart separate from the world, preserved from evil, and set apart for the Lord.

May we not say that, in the Lord's last prayer, we learn the desire of His heart that His people should be as "a garden enclosed"? We hear Him tell the Father, that His own are a separate people, for He can say, "They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world". Again, He desires that they may be a preserved people, for He prays, "Keep them from the evil". Above all, He prays that they may be a sanctified people, for He says, "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17: 14-17).

Does not the Preacher exhort us to keep our hearts as "a garden enclosed", when he says, "Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded"? (Prov. 4: 23, N. Tr.). Again we do well to heed the Lord's own words, "Let your loins be girdled about". Unless the girdle of truth holds in our affections and thoughts, how quickly our minds will be drawn away by the things of this world, and the heart cease to be "a garden enclosed".

Again, the Apostle James desires that our hearts may be preserved from evil, when he warns us, "If ye have bitter envying and strife *in your hearts*, glory not, and lie not against the truth . . . for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3: 14-16). Never has there been a scene of confusion and strife amongst the people of God that has not had its hidden root, of envy and strife, in the heart. We may be sure that the heart that entertains bitterness, envying, and strife, will be no garden for the Lord.

How necessary, then, to have our hearts kept in separation from the world, and preserved from evil. Nevertheless, the refusal of the world, and the flesh, will not be enough to constitute our hearts "a

garden enclosed." The Lord desires that our hearts may be sanctified, or set apart for His pleasure, by being occupied with the truth and all that is according to Christ. Does not the Apostle Paul set before the Philippians "a garden enclosed" — a heart sanctified for the Lord, when he says, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, *think on these things*'?

If the heart is full of cares, fretting over wrongs, and full of bitterness towards those who may have acted badly towards us: if we are entertaining evil imaginations, malicious thoughts, and revengeful feelings towards a brother, it is very certain our hearts will be no garden for the Lord.

If then we would have our hearts freed from things that defile and turn the heart into a barren waste, choking the garden with weeds, let us follow the instruction of the Apostle when he tells us, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Having, like Hannah of old, poured out our hearts before the Lord, and unburdened our minds of all the cares, the sorrows, and the trials that pressed upon our spirits, we shall find that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". Thus set free from all that might come in between the soul and God, our hearts will be at liberty to enjoy the things of Christ, and our minds free to "think on these things" — these holy and pure things which should mark one whose heart is "a garden enclosed".

*A watered garden.* The heart that is set apart for the Lord will have its hidden source of refreshment and joy. It will be a garden with "a spring shut up" and "a fountain sealed". A spring is an unfailing supply; a fountain rises up to its source. The Prophet can say, of one who walks according to the mind of the LORD, that his soul shall be "like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa. 58: 11). To the woman of Sychar the Lord spoke of giving "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life", to be "*in*" the believer. The world is entirely dependent upon surrounding circumstances for its passing joy; the believer has a spring of joy within — the hidden life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the spring of life the Holy Spirit meets all our spiritual needs by guiding us into "all truth": as the fountain of life, He engages our hearts with Christ above. The Lord can say, "the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" — Christ in His new place in the glory. Thus as the Spring, He refreshes our souls with the truth; as the Fountain springing up to its source, He engages our hearts with Christ.

Let us, however, remember that the spring, which is the source of blessing, is "a spring *shut up*", and the fountain is "a fountain *sealed*". Does this not remind us that the source of blessing in the believer is sealed to this world, and wholly apart from the flesh? The Lord speaks of the Comforter as One that "the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14: 17). Again we read, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5: 17).

Alas! we may mind the things of the flesh, and turn aside to the world, only to find we grieve the Spirit so that our hearts, instead of being as a watered garden, become but a dry and barren waste.

*A fruitful garden.* The "spring" and the "fountain" will turn the garden of the Lord into a fruitful garden — "a paradise of pomegranates with precious fruits". The ungrieved Spirit will produce in our hearts "the fruit of the Spirit", which, the Apostle tells us, "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness", and "self-control" (Gal. 5: 22). What, indeed, are these precious fruits of the Spirit but the reproduction of the character of Christ in the believer? The fountain, rising up to its

source, occupies with Christ and His excellencies; and, beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image from glory to glory. Thus the heart becomes a garden of the Lord bearing precious fruit for the delight of His heart.

*A fragrant garden.* Not only is the garden of the Lord a garden of precious fruits, but a garden of spices from which sweet odours arise. In Scripture, fruit speaks of the excellencies of Christ, but the spices, with their fragrance, speak of worship that has Christ for its object. In worship there is no thought of receiving blessing from Christ, but of bringing the homage of our hearts to Christ. When the wise men from the East found themselves in the presence of "the young Child", they fell down and "worshipped Him", and "presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh" (Matt. 2: 11). When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly," she was not, as on other occasions, at His feet as a receiver to get instruction, or find sympathy in her sorrow; she was there as a *giver* to render the worship of a heart filled with the sense of His blessedness. It was good to beat His feet to hear His word, and, again, to beat His feet to receive comfort in sorrow, but in neither case do we read of the ointment with its odour. But when she is at His feet as a worshipper, with her precious ointment, we read, "the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment" (John 12: 1-3).

The Philippian saints in their gift to the Apostle, may indeed have shown forth some of the excellencies of Christ — His comfort of love and compassions — and thus bring forth fruit that would abound to their account; but there was in their gift the spirit of sacrifice and worship which was as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 2: 1; Phil. 4: 17, 18).

In our day, if our hearts are to be a garden of the Lord, let us not forget that the Lord not only looks for the precious fruits of the Spirit, reproducing in us something of His lovely traits, but also the spirit of worship that rises up to Him as a sweet odour.

*A refreshing garden.* Lastly, the Lord would have His garden to be a source of refreshment to the world around. A garden from whence there flow the "living waters". Thus the Lord can speak of the believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, as being a source of blessing to a needy world, as He says, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7: 38, 39).

Thus we learn, from the Song of Songs, that the Lord would fain possess our hearts as a garden of delights for Himself. He stands at the door of our hearts and knocks, for He desires to come in and dwell within our hearts. If we are slow to let Him in, He may say, as the Bridegroom in the Song, "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." He may allow adverse circumstances, trials and sorrows, in order to drive us to Himself, so that we may say like the bride, "let my Beloved come into His garden."

If we open to Him we shall experience the truth of His own words, "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3: 20). In like spirit, when the bride says, "Let my Beloved come into his garden," the Bridegroom at once responds, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey."

If then, the heart of the believer be kept separate from the world, preserved from evil, and set apart for the Lord it will become like "a garden enclosed."

In that garden there will be found a spring of secret joy and refreshment that, like a fountain, rises to its source.

The fountain, springing up to its source, will bring forth precious fruit, the excellencies of Christ.

The fruit that speaks of the moral traits of Christ in the heart of the believer, will lead to worship that rises up as a sweet odour to the heart of Christ.

The heart that goes out in worship to Christ will become a source of blessing to the world around.

In the light of these Scriptures we may well pray the prayer of the Apostle when he bows his knees to the Father, and asks, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that *Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith*" (Eph. 3: 14-17).

A wretched thing it were, to have our heart  
Like a thronged highway or a populous street  
Where every idle thought has leave to meet,  
Pause, or pass on as in an open mart;  
Or like some road-side pool, which no nice art  
Has guarded that the cattle might not beat  
And foul it with a multitude of feet,  
Till of the heavens it can give back no part.  
But keep thou shine a holy solitude,  
For He would walk there, would walk alone;  
He who would drink there, must be first endued  
With single right to call that stream His own;  
Keep thou thine heart, close-fastened, unrevealed,  
A fenced garden and a fountain sealed.

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