

Guest Preacher Rev. Colin Macleod

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Preacher: Rev. Colin F. Macleod

[0 : 0 0] The wonderful words of confession and adoration, words of closeness, we come to God on his terms. As the psalm there has said, I thereupon have unto thee my sin acknowledged, and likewise my iniquity I have not covered. May that be our prayer and song of faith this evening.

We'll turn first of all to the first chapter we read from in Genesis in chapter 2 and 3. If we could keep these chapters open, that would be good this evening. I want us to think about two gardens. Two gardens. The first one described for us here in Genesis 2 and 3, a garden that's named the Garden of Eden, the initial paradise of God, following his creation, his revealing of his power and glory and majesty and order, and saying, let there be and there was.

And we have the world around us in its beauty and wonder, which we've enjoyed today, just to look around in this amazing weather that speaks to us as we look up of the wonder and splendor and glory and power of our God. So I want us to think about this first garden and what happened there, and then contrast it with the second garden we read from in John chapter 20, and look at what happened there. And above all, in looking at both gardens, ask the question, what it means for you and for me this evening, because that is the key thing. Chapter 2 in Genesis tells us that in verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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 tonight we have then two gardens, one in the Old Testament, one in the New Testament. One of them is a garden where a spectacular failure takes place. It is a place of rebellion, a garden of sin. And what happened there and its results for us all has been a banishment from God forever. This is the first garden. In the second garden, there's a great contrast. In the second garden, we see an incredible declaration of victory. It is a place of life and restoration, a place of promise fulfilled that results in humanity through Christ being granted access to God forever. So we have two gardens with a very different outcome and a different message from the same God. But why does this matter? Well, it matters because the events that took place in each garden relate directly to all of us this evening.

They relate to who we are and where we stand in the sight of God tonight. The failure that occurred in Eden had the catastrophic consequence of bringing sin into the heart of not just Adam and Eve, but the human race. Just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin and spread to all men because all sinned, through one man's offence judgment came to all. Thus the declaration and assertion of the New Testament. All are under sin. There are none righteous, no, not one. And the apostle John in his first letter famously sums things up by saying, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Wow, that's devastating. That is how things stand from heaven.

[3 : 43] God sees all things, knows all things, hears all things. God looks at the heart. We, of course, look at the outward, but God looks at the heart. And there we are, born into this condition of sin that entered into Eden through Adam and Eve's rebellion and disobedience toward God. The one thing they were told not to do, they chose to do. The command they were given, they disobeyed. The instruction that God gives here in verse 16, and remember the Lord God commanded the man saying, these words in Genesis 2.16, the first recorded words of God to the human race, you may surely eat out of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. From the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. There's a condition to being in paradise. There's a condition to being in this perfection and communion and fellowship with the living God. And the condition was obedience. That's the condition that we find Satan attacking.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? We read the woman's response. And then the serpent in verse 4 said to the woman, you will not surely die. So what does he do?

He tells a lie. He sows deception, confusion, and brings Adam and Eve into this position of making a moral decision which brings with it moral responsibility. And in this catastrophic moment, they choose autonomy rather than obedience. They strive for power, and they strive to be set free from God. Rather than listening to his instruction of what not to do, they say, well, let's do it anyway. And they sin, and they fall. And from the fall, we go on to speak of original sin.

And so friends, tonight, as we come to our close on Sunday evening, and as we consider the message of Easter has been going on these last number of days, been Easter weekend, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, when so many churches around the world have reflected on the message of, or the good news that came from the second garden, which we'll turn to in a few moments. There's a question here. And the question, I guess, always comes back to, what does Jesus Christ mean to you? Who is the Lord to you?

As he is revealed to us in the Scripture, what does that mean to you? Does your trust in him? Or is he something else? And are you somewhere else? Do you as yet remain unconvinced and unconverted?

[6 : 48] Or is he your Lord, your Savior, your friend? That is the question that matters above all tonight. Let's look then at the first garden, and then turn secondly to look at the other garden, the Gospel of John. Genesis, as we all know, is the book of beginnings. It begins with God. In the beginning, God. And in an awesome display of power and love and majesty and wisdom, he orders and creates, and he does so from nothing, by the power of his word. Let there be, and there was. Creation from nothing, divine activity, supernatural splendor, a glimpse of the hand of God. And we read it all there in Genesis 1. God said, let there be, and there was. And then finally, God saw all things were very good. In Hebrews and in chapter 11, we read these words, through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. God did not need something to start with. He didn't need a flake or a crust or an atom or a speck.

He didn't need some matter in space. He just simply said, let there be, and there was. This is the God of wonders, awesome and glorious in might, wondrous in power and amazing in grace. Let there be, and there was.

And then we have this wonderful description of his creation and his rest. And then there's a move. The Lord took the man and put him in the garden to work it and keep it. He is put there to enjoy felicity and communion in perfect fellowship with the living God, paradise. But there's a condition.

The Lord God commanded the man, you see, you shall surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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.

Here then, at this point, in this garden, the first of our gardens tonight, there is no flaw, there's no mistake, there's nothing wrong, there's no sin, there's beauty, there's order, there's peace. Everything was very good. And so being placed in the garden, we have this scene, of perfection and fellowship, trust, closeness, communion with God. That's described for us in chapter 3, when they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. I've seen we struggle to comprehend and grasp and envisage in our own hearts and minds.

[9 : 47] How could this be? They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. It tells us that this wasn't something that had not happened before. Rather, it's something that was a periodic, continual happening in this state of paradise and communion and fellowship and joy and closeness. Perfect access to the Creator in the garden. And then something happens that changes everything. The Creator who gave Adam and Eve their sense of dignity and morality and rationality, their sense of wonder and their capacity to give to Him glory and worship. He is coming to engage in fellowship with them. And they heard the sound of the Lord God, and they hid themselves.

What's happened? Well, we know because the story is so well known, isn't it? We know it. Chapter and verse, we envisage the scene. We see that the serpent, Satan, has become or managed or been enabled to take this, the form of the serpent. He is now resembling the form of a snake, and he communicates with Eve. Did God actually say? And the lie is sown. The confusion begins. The distrust, the questioning, the challenge, the rebelliousness, the despising of God's rule, the denying of God's sovereignty and God's glory. Here in this lie, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Well, wait, Eve said. Well, no, Eve said we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden.

All of them. But God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, you shall not surely die.

And the lie continues, and the lie grows. And that lie tragically grips the heart and mind and understanding of Eve. And in this moment, in this moment, she decides, well, God has said.

But having thought about it a little bit more, when the woman saw the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, that it was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. What had they been told by God? He commanded them, you shall surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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.

[12 : 46] And in this moment of decision and choice being made, comes the awful realization of moral responsibility. For when we make decisions, we are responsible for them. And their moral capacity is established in the command in Genesis 2, verse 16, where the Lord said, you shall surely eat of everything you cast your eye on. Everything you see in the garden is yours to eat, but you must not eat of the tree in the center of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You shall not eat of that one. If you do, you shall die. There's the command, there's the instruction, there's the divine prerogative, but guided and ensured their bliss, their felicity, their communion with God. And in this moment, they turn away. And it's well said and well understood that in doing so, they sought not the rule of God, not to give glory to his reign and his majesty, but they sought autonomy. They said, well, what does it matter? What God has said? And in this first garden, we see the familiar and tragic story of sin entering into the world. Of course, many just rejected it of hand as a fable, as a fairy tale. Many of our contemporary society and culture, I think they call them the new atheists, militant atheism, which has become rampant in the last 20 to 30 years. Hawkins and Dawkins and Hitchens and many others. Dawkins, of course, in his arrogance, won't even share a stage or a platform with a creationist, for he feels to do so gives credence to the creationist. And there we have that blinding arrogance that's here at the heart of the devil's life. Did God actually say this to you, Eve? Well, the fall from perfection into sin, it's nothing to laugh about. It's an action of taking what told not to do. It's an action of doing what told not to do. And that is sin in essence, to do what God forbids and not to do what God commands.

And this is not something that we grow up into. It's not something that we begin to emulate as we grow up. The sin that flows from Adam and Eve as the covenant head comes into the human race.

We're born in this condition. It's a condition and situation that we're born into. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. So we find in the garden a refusal to give God his rightful place in their hearts and minds and their rebellion brings judgment upon them.

The Lord God called to the man and said to him, where are you? What a solemn word that is. Where are you? I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself. The conscience is screaming at Adam and it is screaming at Eve that something is wrong.

They cannot approach the holiness of God. They cannot seek to enter into fellowship with God. They cannot enjoy communion with God. The bliss, the felicity, the paradise, the perfection, it's been undermined. It's been corroded. The virus of sin is doing its work and now the separation is confirmed. The separation is set. He said, who told you you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat? Have you done what I told you not to do? Isn't that what the gospel says to us all tonight? The gospel calls us to account for our disobedience, for our refusal to give God the glory, for our refusal to acknowledge our sinfulness, our wickedness, our need to be cleansed, our need to be forgiven. And so many try to come to God any which way, any other way, but by the cross, but by the designated means of our salvation, which is the Lord of glory. I want to read to you just a very sad transcript from an interview that Hitchens gave before his death. I think it was in 2011 or 2012. Christopher Hitchens, one of the most anti-gospel philosopher, writer, commentator of a generation, of an era. And he was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman and it was sneering and it was horrible to watch. They just laughed and dismissed so much of what we hold so precious and dear in the Christian message. And he was asked toward the end of the interview that what he would do if when he was to die, which he was shortly to do, he was suffering from cancer, what he would do if he discovered on entering eternity he was wrong, that there is a God. He said, if I am surprised to find when I pass on from this veil of tears, that I am facing a tribunal, I will say, I hope you noticed I didn't try to curry favour with anyone. It's just that I was unable to believe your human spokespersons. Anyone want to say this? I am not going to try anything servile. I am resolved in that point. To be servile is to be humble. To be servile is to have an attitude of humility, of the willingness to bow in the presence of greatness. And so we have Hitchens saying, if I do meet with God, if I am confronted with a holy God,

[18 : 33] I want to be servile. I am resolved on that point. Friends, someone once said that hell is truth seen too late. And for Hitchens with that attitude, unless he changed his heart before dying, would have experienced that reality. Hell is truth seen too late. And that is what we see beginning to occur here in Genesis chapter 3. As you read on the chapter, you will see that the Lord drives them from the garden. Chapter 3 and verse 24, he drove out the man at the east of the garden of Eden. He placed a cherry boom and a flaming sword that turned every way. Why? To guard the way to the tree of life. And now we have a story of death. The wages of sin is death. And because of this decision, because of this responsibility that comes with the decision to turn from God, to despise the covenant commitment and the requirement for obedience and humility and dependence, to turn away from the path of obedience and to take what God has said not to take, sin and death is doing its work.

And so, friends, we have the first garden. I want us to turn very briefly to our second garden tonight. Because here in this second garden, there is a wonderful contrast, which shows us the lengths that God himself was prepared to go to undo what happened in the first garden. After these things, we read that a disciple of Jesus called Joseph came and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, that he might take the body down. And he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also came with him. And they came by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight. And so they took the body of Jesus, bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden. And in the garden, a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. Here now is another garden. It's just outside the ancient city walls of Jerusalem.

We don't actually know where. It doesn't really matter. We don't need to have a six-figure grid reference or a reference point for a sat-nav to take us there today. What we need to know is what happened in that garden. We have the Son of God laid in a grave in this garden, lifeless, bloodied and bruised and broken, dead. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the triunity of God revealed to us in the Scripture, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we see the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, the Word who was in the beginning with God, the Word who was God, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley, the fairest among ten thousand, the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, dead in a grave in a garden. What kind of message is this? This is a message that has written loud and clear over it, the love of God. The love of God. Here then is the extent to which

God was prepared to go to save a people to himself. For God so loved the world that he gave.

He gave his only Son so that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And how his enemies thought they had won that day, how they were delighted, how they gave themselves a resounding pat on the back as they made their way back into the city to feast and to celebrate his death. His enemies and detractors who had opposed him for three long years, criticizing, mocking, abusing, calling him for everything, calling him the friend of sinners, calling his mother for being an immoral woman, accusing the disciples of being reckless, accusing them of being dishonoring to God, all sorts of abuse and accusations thrown at Jesus. And now finally they've had their way. He's been crucified. He's suffered six long hours on that cross and now he is buried without life. Dead. The wages of sin is death. And what we have here is the Son of God who was without sin, having given up his life.

[23 : 25] Why? That he might open up a new and living way. And the wonder of this second garden is that here there is a great contrast with the fall and the misery and the spread of sin and death from the first garden. Now in this garden we go on to read the story of Jesus and the resurrection. His appearing to Mary Magdalene at the tomb in this garden. And we have now a place of life and light and victory.

Chapter 19 and verse 41. In the place where he was crucified there was a garden. And the garden, a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. And so Jesus was laid there. But he's no longer there because the grave is open. And the grave is empty. And his enemies had nothing to say. There was no more detraction and denial. All they had to do to destroy finally, once and for all, the claims of the Christian church was to produce a body. But they couldn't because there was no body. Christ had risen from the dead. The voice of the angel, the angel's message to the woman. Why do you seek the living among the dead? He's not here. He has risen just as he said. So we find Mary on this garden on this first Easter morning, going to the garden brokenhearted. She came to the tomb early while it was still dark and saw the stone had been taken away. She couldn't even wait till sunrise. She couldn't even wait till the official end of the Jewish Sabbath. So she came and it was still dark. And we're told from the other writers that she wasn't alone and that there was a group of women. They came with the spices and the oils and the ointments, thinking that they would pay reverence to Jesus by anointing his dead body. But they found their spices to be redundant. There was no body to anoint.

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, we read in verse 11. And as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb and she saw two angels. And such is her grief and her contrition that she converses with them.

Why are you weeping, they say. They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid them. Having said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing. The angels display divine activity. The supernatural is pouring out into this garden.

But she did not know that it was Jesus. And Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener. She said, Sir, if you have carried him away, will you tell me where you have laid him? And I will take him away.

[26 : 18] Jesus said, Mary. She thought she was speaking to a gardener. The one through whom and by whom all things are made. Colossians chapter 1 and verse 18. Just look at these verses this evening if you have time to look at the supremacy and the sufficiency of Christ. He is the one through whom all these things were made. God in his glory let there be.

And we're told that that outpouring of glory, that outworking and finality of creation had at its core Christ. Christ is active. Christ is involved.

He is in some way not just the gardener. He is the creator king. And she thought she was speaking to a gardener. Such is her grief. Her heart and mind broken, thinking Jesus is gone. He's died. She knew she'd seen him die on the cross. She'd seen him buried. And she assumed he was still there.

But she was wrong in that assumption. There was no body there. And friends, just to say at this point, if you ever need convincing about the seriousness of sin, then here it is.

He is the Son of God, lifeless, in a tomb, in a garden, outside the ancient city of Jerusalem. Why? He was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law. And in order to do that, he became a curse for us. Why? Because we could do nothing about our condition of sin, the original sin, the condition by nature to which we're born. We cannot do anything about it. We can't earn our way to heaven. We can't work our way to heaven. We can't impress God. We can't somehow throw off the burden of sin by good works. We can't do things that will in some way contribute to our salvation.

[28 : 16] We are spiritually dead. That's how Ephesians 2 describes our natural standing before God. And then Christ came.

And he preached a message of repentance and belief. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent, he said, and believe the good news. What good news? That now there is hope and peace and joy and acceptance and forgiveness through him. We've sung tonight already here of the Lord being our hiding place. What a wonderful, precious description that is of the Christian standing tonight, hidden in Christ.

Hidden from what? Not perhaps hidden from what, but hidden from who? Hidden from the Father, who in his divine holiness will seek recompense for our sin unless we are hidden in Christ. Unless our sins are covered by his blood. Unless we have had our burden removed and our debt cancelled by Christ, then we remain under the wrath and judgment of God. For the wages of sin is death.

Sin is a spiritual virus, a poison that affects us all, that mars the soul and bars our way to the tree of life. And Jesus opened up that way by giving himself. He paid our price. He took our place.

He won our peace. This is our saviour. This is our song. Where once there was no hope, now there is hope. Where once there was no access, no acceptance, no life, now in Jesus we have it all. That's what Mary discovered that day outside the tomb. The woman, why are you weeping? And she said, they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Mary, turn round. Just, just turn round.

[30 : 15] And she didn't know that it was Jesus. When he said to her, woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away, Jesus said to her, Mary. And then she recognized. Then she understood. And suddenly it dawned on her that she was speaking to Jesus.

This is our saviour, and this is our song. In Christ we have it all. Here in this other garden, the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley roots out and destroys the guilt of sin and power of death.

He breaks its power by being raised from the dead. And that is a declaration by the Father that his offer in our place was acceptable and pleasing to him. And so the price for sin has been paid, but unless until we come to Christ and are hidden in Christ and are covered by Christ, we remain here under the wrath and the judgment of God. Friends, this second garden is a declaration.

Christ won the war. The grave was empty. It could not hold him. Its power has been broken. And so for millennia, the Christian church has said, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. But friends, I don't want to offer you a liturgy. I don't want to offer you a song.

I don't want to offer you a practice. I want to ask you tonight if you are hidden in Christ. If you have come to him yourself. If you have made the New Testament prayer your prayer, Lord be merciful to me, a sinner. You see, he was dead, but now he is alive. And he responds to our prayers. He responds as we come in sincerity of heart. And as we seek him, we are told and promised that if we seek him with all our heart, he will be found by us. Are you seeking tonight?

[32 : 20] What did he say there to Mary outside the tomb? Why are you weeping? Who are you seeking? How would you answer that this evening? Are you seeking Christ tonight? I trust so. Is that not why we're here to reflect on the glory of the gospel, a wonderful living redeemer who gave himself for us?

Is that not why we're here tonight? To worship and sing praise to God, to thank him for this glorious provision of his unique beloved son? When he said, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And what does he say? He says, come to me and I will give you rest. With Christ, it's personal. No one can come for you. No one can seek repentance for you. No one can seek and secure forgiveness for you other than Christ. And you must come yourself. Find that place. Make it your life's ambition tonight, if as yet you do not know him, to go to a place of privacy and silence and quiet and get on your own that you can get with Christ and seek him until you find him.

Call out to the one who in his dying breaths declared, I thirst. And in that moment opened up the wells of salvation that you and I might drink deeply to the satisfaction of our souls. With God, it's personal. You see, in creation, he shows us his hand. In salvation, he shows us his heart.

This is my beloved son. And here he is now, raised from the dead, speaking to Mary, telling her to go.

[34 : 11] And he says, do not cling to me, but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my father and your father. And what happens? Mary goes and she announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord.

The best news the world has ever heard comes from a graveyard and is brought by Mary to the disciples and that he had said these things to her. And so the message of the second garden is what fills our hearts tonight with hope and fills our hearts with anticipation. In this, the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. May we all tonight be found to be living through him, having come to the Redeemer who was dead and now is alive.

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's bow in prayer for a moment. Lord, we thank you tonight for this evening hour we can spend gathered around your word.

We pray, Lord, tonight for insight and discernment, that we might grow in grace and that we might deepen our faith, Lord, that we might grow up into him, the one who is the head of the body, the king of the church, the saviour of sinners, Jesus, through whom, by whom all things were made. We bless you that our redeemer lives. We are at times, Lord, staggered to consider that the Son of God died for us. May we this evening be found numbered with those hidden in him, looking to him and living for him. In his name we ask these things. Amen.

Now we'll turn to sing psalms and we'll conclude our service singing from Psalm 115. Psalm 115, we'll sing from verse 10 and we'll sing to verse 18. O house of Aaron, trust the Lord, he is their help and shield.

[36 : 25] All you who fear him, trust the Lord, he is your help and shield. We'll sing from verse 10 to verse 18 to the end of the psalm. To the praise of God. O house of Aaron, trust the Lord, he is their help and shield.

All you who fear him, trust the Lord, he is your help and shield. The Lord remembers Israel.

And he will bless us all. The house of Aaron and all those who fear him, great and small.

May God the Lord make you increase, both you and all your life.

May you be blessed by God who makes all things by His design.

[38 : 36] The highest depth belongs to God, the earth to us He gave.

It's not the dead who praise the Lord, there's silent in the grave.

But we exalt the Lord on high, His majesty proclaim.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Amen.

[40 : 16] . . .

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