

The Two Gardens

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." ⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." ⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." ⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." (Matthew 26:36–46)

My family and I have often enjoyed walking in botanical gardens. In one we've been to there is a poem on a plaque near a small water fountain, with the words,
The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,--
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.

I rather scoffed at those words when I read them, because they just seemed to be sentimental, and lacking in much truth. But I changed my mind when much later I found out that those lines were just one stanza that had been extracted from a larger poem.

In the beautiful artistry of God, a Garden is where man began, and a Garden is where man was rescued. A garden is where man fell, and a garden is where man began to be restored. The fate of man was settled in two gardens.

On Good Friday we often focus on Calvary, on the agonies of the Cross. But we often miss the fact that the sufferings of Christ really began late Thursday night into the early hours of Friday morning, when Jesus began tasting Calvary in the Garden of Gethsemane. As we look more closely at the Garden of Gethsemane experience of Christ, and compare it to our first parents in the Garden of Eden, it will become clear how the Lord Jesus was reversing and undoing in one Garden what we had done in another.

I. The Place of the Garden

Let us set the scene, it is Thursday on our calendars, and that means Passover for some Jews. By this time in Jewish history, the Passover Lambs were killed over two days, as Jews from the north celebrated it a day early, calculating the day from sunup to sunset, as we do. That is why Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover on Thursday night, while Jews from Jerusalem are going to celebrate it the next day, since they calculated the day beginning at sunset.

But for our purposes, it is Thursday evening, and Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover meal. Judas leaves during the meal to go and betray Jesus and it is once he is gone that Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. He then teaches them what life will now be like with Him gone, in what we call the Upper Room Discourse.

Judas was probably hoping to come back to the Upper Room with soldiers to betray Jesus, but Jesus buys extra time by changing locations before Judas can come back with soldiers. So in the middle

of His talk, at the end of chapter 14, He says, get up, let's go from here. He wants extra time to teach them, and to pray. He takes them to a place east of Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives. They probably pass some vineyards on the way, and Jesus teaches them that He is the Vine and they are the branches, and that life once He is gone is going to be about abiding, remaining in Him, so that the Holy Spirit will now manifest the life of Jesus in them.

They reach a small garden, privately owned, likely a small walled area with olive trees. Apparently the owner had allowed Jesus and His disciples to go there from time to time. Matthew and Mark tell us it was called Gethsemane (or Gat-Shemen, "oil press"). Somewhere near the entrance, Jesus prayed the prayer we read in John 17, a prayer of thanks and intercession for His disciples.

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, But He then leaves eight of the disciples, and asks only Peter, James and John to go with Him deeper into the garden.

And now, the fate of humanity is going to be settled in a Garden once again. Everything that happens or does not happen on Friday at Calvary will first be decided here in the Garden late on Thursday evening. What Jesus decides to do in the Garden will determine everything else. He is going to be arrested, He will face six trials, multiple forms of physical torture, the agony of crucifixion, and something much worse in the spiritual realm. But it is here, in the Garden, that Jesus will begin to face it, and decide which way He is going to go. He does have a choice. And as He will tell Peter, who tries to take matters into his own hand with a sword, "Matthew 26:53 ⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus has options, but what option He will take must be settled in an agony of prayer and choice here in Gethsemane.

The Second Adam, Jesus Christ, will settle the matter in a Garden, because the First Adam brought ruin and destruction in a Garden. Remember the text? "Genesis 2:8-9

⁸ The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed."

Not a small, walled Garden, and not in the dead of night. The Garden of Eden was a paradisaical, flourishing place of beauty, safety and plenty. There were no problems to blame for a wrong action. No hunger or thirst, no discomfort or deprivation, no social ills, no political tyranny, no lack of education, no racism or sexism, no poverty, no exploitation. Man was in a perfect place with no problems. And yet it was in that perfect place that the problems began. The problems were not around them, they were inside them.

But here the Second Adam, with no problems inside Him, will enter a Garden so as to solve and take on all the problems around Him. He takes with Him the inner three, Peter, James and John, and enters the Garden to begin to face what Calvary would be.

II. The Pain of the Garden

and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me;

Sorrowful and deeply distressed. We have never seen Jesus in this state before, in all of the Gospels, though confronted with demons, disease, opposition, threats, attempted stoning, weeks of fasting.

He has never been in this place.

These words refer to severe emotional distress, inner pain, anguish. Jesus is experiencing a crushing mental and emotional burden that is completely sapping His strength and even His will to live. He is dying before He dies as the weight and pain and grief cloud His soul like a thick darkness. He begs His friends to support Him in prayer, but He has no physical strength to even stay upright. He falls flat on the ground before His Father in prayer.

The Gospel of Luke gives us more insight into the depth of the pain.

⁴³ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:43–44)

To even make it through Gethsemane, Jesus needed the presence of an angel, giving him the physical and mental strength to see this through, to face the test and come out. Luke tells us that His sweat included blood, an actual condition known as hematohidrosis, which occurs under extreme stress.

Now what could have caused this kind of stress in Jesus? What was He enduring that led to this kind of stress?

It could not have been fear of death. Jesus was no coward, with less bravery than His disciples. The followers of Jesus for centuries afterwards stared death in the face in the Roman circus, on the wooden pyre, before the executioner's sword. He had long predicted His own death, and had perfectly orchestrated matters up to the very day.

It was not the fear of the pain or the agonies of crucifixion. He was well acquainted with physical suffering, and knew as violent and as torturous as they might be, they would pass.

It could not have been some Satanic attack. Jesus had faced the Tempter before in the wilderness and had not suffered like this.

What Jesus begins to face in Gethsemane is the full spiritual reality of the Cross. He starts to taste the meaning, not of the agony of death of crucifixion, but the pain, shame and separation of the Cross. Calvary begins in Gethsemane. Golgotha began in the Garden.

What did that mean? It meant that Jesus began to taste death for every man. He tasted the meaning of being the sin-bearer. Being fully God, Jesus knew of His own revulsion for sin. Jesus hated sin with holy hatred. He had perfect hatred for sin, a moral revulsion at all evil.

But in these night hours in the Garden, Jesus begins to experience the horror of what is coming. He will stand alone, suspended between Heaven and Earth, as the hurricane of God's fury and holy hatred of sin come crashing down upon Him and Him alone. Not only will He lose fellowship with the Father, the Father will treat Jesus as the Substitute for all sinners and all sin. And just take one sinner, and ask what should be done to him. But now take all people, and all sin, and the full debt to God's glory, and pour it on one soul. Jesus is going to experience an intensity of anger, displeasure, wrath, fury, and hatred that is more violent than any attack any man has known.

12 I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He also has taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target, 13 His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity; He pours out my gall on the ground. 14 He breaks me with wound upon wound; He runs at me like a warrior. (Job 16:12-14)

4 For the arrows of the Almighty are within me; My spirit drinks in their poison; The terrors of God are arrayed against me. (Job 6:4)

The hymnwriter put it this way:

Tell me, ye who see Him groaning, was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning, Foes insulting His distress
Many hands were raised to wound Him, none would interpose to save,
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him, was the stroke that Justice gave.

This is not a burden of pain or of facing loss. This is the burden of shame, of guilt, and of all the penalty and punishment for all that guilt. Have you ever felt so guilty that you felt sick, so ashamed that you felt weakened, so burdened by the punishment you knew you deserved? Here Jesus begins to feel the weight of the world's sin and shame, the guilt of it all, and the wrath that it deserves. Perfect holiness, perfect love must now confront, and wear and bear absolute evil and wrath.

Gethsemane is where Jesus must wrestle with this. He is sipping that cup and must decide if He will drink it all down.

Now compare this to the struggle Adam and Eve faced. Their struggle was this: shall we go on living under the authority and guidance of God, letting Him be our conscience and our law, or should we strike out for independence? Should we trust that God is good, and the definition of good, or should we find out if there is a kind of goodness outside of God? Should we live as image-bearers of the true God, or become gods in our own right? God says we will lose life if we eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but the serpent says we will lose out on real life if we keep obeying God.

Jesus' struggle was whether He would give up His life for us. Adam and Eve's struggle was whether they would reject the life God had given them.

Though the disciples were not going through it, the exhaustion of the moment even overcame them

⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." (Matthew 26:40–41)

⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. (Matthew 26:43)

What did Jesus resolve to do in the Garden?

III. The Prayer In the Garden

What does Jesus do?

³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." (Matthew 26:39)

Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Matthew 26:42)

⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:44)

Three times over, Jesus asks for release from this assignment, but each time states in principle that He will accept His Father's will. He is asking for the Father to find another way, but yielding to the fact that the Father may turn down this request.

Now what is going on here? This is probably the clearest moment when we see the two natures of Jesus and the two wills of Jesus, united in one Person. As the second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, He shared the same will as the Father. In the Godhead, the three Persons are not separate in their wills, but united in one.

But as a true human, born of Mary, He had an unfallen, morally perfect will. These two wills were perfectly united in one Person, so that the Person of Jesus Christ always acted according to the will of the Father. His will as Eternal Son was the same as the will of the Father, and His will as incarnate Son of Man was always submitted to that will.

But here is the first moment where we see His human will feeling the burden, the weight of submitting to the divine will. His perfect, unfallen human will must now embrace sin, guilt, shame, and wrath from God, and the weight of that is crushing. And since both natures are in union, we can say it this way: according to His humanity, He asks three times for this to be removed, while submitting. But what is the will of the triune God? It was God's will that the Son should die in the place of man. According to His divine will, He wants to atone for our sin. According to His human will, He shrinks back from the horror of it.

Do you see that what Jesus is doing in prayer is the first real dying? Before He will die *for* others, and die on behalf of others, He must die to even the innocent desire to avoid the shame and guilt of the Cross. He must die to His own lawful human desire to not want the anguish, the abandonment, the separation, the shame. He must die to all the lawful desires He has and give them up if He is to achieve the Cross.

The only way to defeat the selfish sin that brought death, was to die to even lawful self-regard, and take on our sin.

This is why the phrase that Jesus repeated more often in the Gospels is this one:

Matthew 10:39 ()

³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 16:25

²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Mark 8:35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

Luke 9:24

²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.

Luke 17:33

³³ Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

John 12:25

²⁵ He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is how the Garden of Gethsemane reverses the Garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden mankind said, I will seek life on my own terms, I will find life, save life, get life, gain life independently of God, on my own, and I will live, really live. I won't let life pass my by, I won't

miss out on the pleasures and powers and glories that Satan says are waiting for me. Through independence, through Selfishness, I will really live.

But God says, no, that's how you die. You begin to die that way, and then, you keep dying, until finally your body dies, and then you die forever, forever receding into yourself, forever darkening into the prison of yourself.

But, if your trust Me, and die to Self through My Son, then you will really live. As springtime follows winter, so real life follows a voluntary death to self.

C.S Lewis: "Humanity must embrace death freely, submit to it with total humility, drink it to the dregs, and so convert it into that mystical death which is the secret of life. But only a Man who did not need to have been a Man at all unless He had been chosen, only one who served in our sad regiment as a volunteer, yet also only one who was perfectly a Man, could perform this perfect dying; and thus...either defeat death or redeem it. He tasted death on behalf of all others. He is the representative 'Die-er' of the universe: and for that very reason the Resurrection and the Life."

To put it another way, some of the most important words Jesus may have said while on Earth were the words, "Not my will, but thine be done." That was the same as saying, "I accept the Cross". "I choose not to rescue my life, but to give it up, because it's the only way for others to be rescued.

In many ways, the most important words you will ever speak is when you come to God through Jesus Christ, and say the same thing, "Not my will, but thine be done" "I accept the Cross in my life; I accept my life as I want to live it must die, so that the real life, God's life may grow in me."

The poem I quoted at the beginning actually begins this way:

The Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And He set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled.

So near to the peace of Heaven,
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.

The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,--
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.

For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive-trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease. - Dorothy Gurney

Which Garden are you in? Are you still trying to get life independently? That Garden is dead, and will keep dying. Or go to Gethsemane, make the words of Jesus your own, accept His death as your death, His life as your life, and you will have life, and life in abundance.