

Christ's church, a garden (Quality: Good, quiet)

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Preacher: Collier, Gilbert (1900-1984)

[0 : 00] I would like to bring your thoughts this morning to a word found in the Song of Solomon, the fourth chapter and the fifteenth verse.

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

These words are in the fifteenth verse of the fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon. If there should be one here this morning, who as I read out my text may be inclined to think that such a word could have no personal application to their own hearts and cases.

Let me say this, that as we look at this part of the word, which really is the Lord's own description in this most sacred figurative language of his church, while it may be his description of that church as a whole, I would have you remember that the Lord always considers every individual in his church.

The description is by way of this illustration of a garden. God's church is made up of individual believers.

[2 : 44] And if the Lord is pleased in his word to describe the whole, or speak of the whole church, let us remember this, that he is speaking of every individual unit.

God's church is made up of individual believers. And if by God's help we are able to see this morning something in this word that reflects upon our own experience, or gives some measure of hope or expectation.

or realization that there is something in us that corresponds to the truth of God and the description of God's truth.

It then will be indeed a personal experience of comfort and blessing. Now, this word is really the bridegroom's view of his bride.

This is how he sees her. This is the way he describes her. and if we look into this word and try to discover the meaning of this description I think we shall see what a mighty thing a wonderful thing that God has made and placed in the earth to be a witness to all men of his truth and his power this church that he has formed for himself and which he has adorned with all the beauty that she possesses and we have three things here spoken of about this church first of all it is in the eyes of the blessed bridegroom it is as it were a fountain of gardens and also it says secondly that it is a well of living waters here we find the church's secret source of life, fertility and beauty there is a well in the very centre of it that is ever living, ever supplying all its needs and keeping it constantly fresh virile and full of beauty and then that is the inward secret source of supply then there is the outward streams from Lebanon one is invisible the other is visible and

[6 : 44] God's church is visibly supported by the gospel and the doctrines of the gospel as they are proclaimed by his sent servants they are like these streams of Lebanon ever flowing freely and freshly to water and to refreshing this beautiful garden now I want to dwell first of all on this description of the bridegroom of his bride and let us remember this that it is exclusively his description not hers her description of herself is very very different she says in another place she says

I have put off my coat how can I put it on those words seem to my mind to suggest that this character this bride was in considerable trouble because she had put off the old garments of profession that which she was once adorned with when she was in the world and among and of the world she has put that garment off left it on one side completely but she is in constant trouble about whether she will have to put it on again or whether it is in some way creeping around her again that old way of life that old profession that which belonged to the world she seems as if she is in trouble lest that might return again and she be found no better than she was once when she was in the world without any real desire for her beloved or any knowledge of him when she was taken up with the things of time and sense then again she says

I have washed my feet how shall I defile you see she had walked into a path where there had been cleansing a new way she had found and her lord had cleansed her and her great fear is this lest she might again find defilement from the world so she does not describe herself in this wonderful way that her beloved bridegroom does he sees her as in his eyes as she really is he sees her as clothed in all the beauty of his own comeliness he looks down upon her in the light of his grace and he sees her as he has made her and not only so but he looks at her in this way and manner in this light he sees her as being a veritable effusion of life and reality now you know my friends the church the idea of the church is regarded in many ways by the world the world looks at the church of

God with disdain and can see no real purpose whatever in the church they think that it is just something that pleases a little section of humanity and while they would not deprive that section of the apparent comfort that they get from the church they have no desire whatsoever to have anything to do with the church then the professing that's the profane world then the professing world looks upon the church in a very various kind of ways some of them think of it as an institution that is a kind of an insurance against evil they would not be without it simply because they think that having the church in some form or other they will be guaranteed safety and also after this world be assured of an endless life of blessing and peace well all these ideas and notions about

God's church are wrong God has made his church he has brought it out of the wilderness it was once this garden that he speaks of here was once a sheer wilderness with nothing but desolation in it and this beloved almighty lord he has taken this church and enclosed it in the wilderness and every particle of what she is now has been through his work his goodness his power but as we have it in the twelfth verse he calls her there a garden enclosed you know enclosure of God's church is a very vital part of the work of God's grace people mock today about the enclosed garden but how important it is it's important for you individually believer

[14 : 21] God's grace has enclosed you and will keep you in that enclosure through time until eternity and it's the most necessary thing for your continuity and it is also most necessary that through this enclosing of God's grace you are what you are separated from the world and made a habitable place for the Lord himself now this is what the three things we can see in this description this morning of the beloved bridegroom of his bride as being a garden first of all it is a veritable effusion of power and of life a garden which he speaks of in this way a fountain of

God and it's in the numerical sense you see I think the Lord is looking down on all the little companies and communities of his own people and individuals as well and he looks at them through the eyes of his grace and he sees them as a veritable power in the earth from whence there is being as it were effused life and power and the testimony of reality now that's the first thing and I want us to fasten our minds upon it a little this morning because you may feel you may feel sometimes to be very very empty inefficient and seemingly to lack any purpose in life in your life and you feel oh that I might be taken up more by the

Lord and with the Lord and be of some use to his people in his service you feel you want more energy you feel you want more opportunity you feel that you are like a cumber of the ground with very little purpose or any fulfilment of what your heart so much longs to be able to fulfil well now we have these things here in this description first of all then a veritable fountain of power and life likened unto this God then secondly we have a place of fragrance and beauty and thirdly we have a place where the owner may rest and find habitation and I think that the figure here used is a very striking one because if you look into the next chapter the beloved bridegroom bride their speech she said or the bridegroom speaks

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 oh friends drink yea drink abundantly oh beloved so he says then the great object of this blessed bridegroom is to come into his garden now I want to take this figure and try to develop it a little this morning and first of all I want us to remember this the garden is comprised of individual plants everyone has been planted garden does not does not make itself or create itself but it has been planned by the gardener and planted by the gardener and what a place of beauty it can be recently whilst we were in

Scotland passing through the highlands there with all their rugged beauty seemed as if they were just the result of the maker's handiwork there was no conceived plan the beauty is the absence of any plan perhaps and then in the midst of that way out in the wild we came across a garden seemed almost to be out of place and yet it was a most striking most beautiful and remarkable place indeed it was planned and cultivated in a most efficient way and manner and one could not pass it without realising that there had been a great measure of thought interest and endeavour put forth to create that garden and what a place it was the public were invited to enter and to enjoy the beauties of it and those that did came out and exclaimed the wonderful nature of the garden what pains had been put into it and what toil had very evidently been employed not only in its construction but in its continuation now when you come to think of these terms in the light of

[22 : 33] God's grace and his dealings and his doings with his people oh what a immeasurable amount of wisdom and grace and love there has been put forth by God in the formation of his church the garden he sees it as a garden every plant in this church has been planted by the hand of the Lord and the Lord not only looks upon his garden as a place of as so to speak silent beauty and pleasantness but he looks upon his garden as he speaks of it here as a fountain so to speak a thing a power that is to reach forth flow forth

I think it's a very wonderful description really of the church you know I think it gives us some inkling as to what the real meaning of the church is perhaps we have lost to a certain extent the conception of God's church and the purpose of that church this church of God occupies a place in the mind and in the purposes of God which are supreme it's through this church that God will deal with the world and it's through his church that he will witness to the world of his greatness his truth and his glory

God and it's through the church like a fountain as it were a fountain of power and truth and reality that God will affect the lives of a great many people outside in the world so whilst we are thankful indeed that we are a garden enclosed we've got to remember this that we are enclosed for the sole occupation of the Lord himself but we are a church that will reach out to others in the world I think we have the same illustration in the case of Joseph you remember what it was said of

Joseph Joseph is a fruitful bough even a fruitful bough by a well whose branches reach over the wall not to be confined exclusively for the owner but in the vineyard itself but whose branches were to reach over the wall and be a benefit to those without now I said at the beginning that some might feel that there was no personal or individual message in this word that they could profit under or receive to themselves but I feel sure you will see this that as God's church is made up of units of individuals I believe your prayer will be this oh

Lord make me a veritable power in the earth make me something useful make me to show forth thy beauty and thy glory let me not live for myself alone let me not be exclusively taken up with my own interest and purposes but rather may I be so moved and used by thee for thy glory a fountain of God that is I believe the meaning it's a very striking and wonderful description now there are several things that we can see I read that chapter this morning the 12th of Romans and I think that you have there if we could so look at it

[27 : 54] I think in the 12th of Romans you have the spiritual view of God's garden now he says in the third verse of that chapter I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly one great thing with a garden is the humility of it I think if you walk alone sometimes in a garden one of the great things that seem to impress you it does at least it does me is the sense of humility thing there's nothing that we can do we cannot change a plant we cannot make a plant we cannot cause it to grow and all the plant each plant that there is in that garden is different different in structure different in size different in fragrance different in appearance and when you stand in the midst of all the beauty around you what is the thought you feel how humble you are with all these wonderful things none of which you have been able to alter or to create

I think there's a great thing with the garden this is where the power of it is there is humility and then another thing in the Romans he says think not but to think soberly according as God hath given to every man the measure of faith and then another thing in the garden there's conformity there's conformity of growth and there's a wonderful symmetry there's an order there there's no confusion maybe a great deal of variety and we shall come to that in a moment but Paul says as we have many members in one body all members have not the same office no there are many plants in a garden and they differ widely in nature the length they grow and the time they grow but they're all in the garden they're all part of the garden and although there's variety wonderful variety perhaps the variety in a garden makes it what it is if there was all only one plant we should hardly take the time to look into or enter into the garden but the variety is the attraction of it and in the eyes of the

Lord we are many members says the word we are many members we have not the same office but we are all part of the same body the same God if we are planted by the Lord if the grace of God has been in our hearts we may differ from one another very greatly and widely but we are in one place we have one purpose then another thing having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us he goes on to speak of the purpose or the fulfillment of purpose in the garden and you'll notice in the latter part of the chapter the 12th chapter of

Romans how Paul speaks of one thing after another beginning with the the chiefest of all love let love be without dissimulation and from that point he goes through all the motions so to speak that make up a living body a church that is fulfilling its function and a people who are aiming at the glory of God and if you look at it let love be without dissimulation abhor that which is evil cleave to that which is good be kindly affectioned one toward another and so on and thus you see these plants in the garden all conforming to one end an object all fulfilling one great design and purpose and that is to show

Paul the beauty of the handiwork of its owner and maker then let me come to this what outstanding feature there is there in a garden well we should say this no doubt the beauty of it and where does the beauty of the garden of the Lord come from it comes from the Lord himself it is the reflection of his beauty every bloom in a garden comes from the sun it is the light of the sun that produces every colour all the colours that we know in the world comes from that light that orb of light the sun and every vestige every shade of colour proceeds from that one light and therefore we can say in regard to natural gardens that every colour there is has all come from the sun and so it is with the church of God there is no beauty there except it be the beauty of the

[35 : 45] Lord Jesus Christ we are ugly creatures left to ourselves with nothing but sin to mar our best and to stain everything we have but our beauty it must come from Jesus Moses speaks in the 90th Psalm and he says this let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us I think one of the great things that the world has to recognise and that is this the beauty the order the perfection of the state and the comprising of the church of God who is this says the song of

Solomon in another flower fair as the moon clear as the sun terrible as an army with banners it is the church well my dear friends we may not feel very beautiful our lives may not seemingly reflect much beauty but remember this a person can never see their own beauty and it is therefore not becoming for an individual to lay great claim to great powers and spirituality we have to acknowledge that we are nothing but what a wonderful thing if anyone sees in us the marks of God's grace if they can see some evidence some likeness of Jesus

Christ that's wonderful thing that's a wonderful thing and that is the reflection of his beauty I've spoken of this before but when I first came here 37 years ago there was a dear old saint I looked up to that person and almost felt unworthy to be in her presence that was old Mrs.

James she had been a member here for 64 years so that's going back a great deal length of time and she was a person that lived in the very presence of the Lord the world around her and outside had no place in her thoughts or in her interests she lived she lived for the things of God and to be found in her place on the Lord's day here in that second pew where she sat and drank in as it were the word of God it was an experience that had a great effect upon me in my early days now that dear old soul could never see anything in herself she longed to know that she was one of the real people of

God and yet everyone else could see in her something that they ended and longed to have in themselves and yet she herself could only still beg and cry to the Lord to put her right and keep her right I remember Mr.

[39 : 58] Foogs came once and she was speaking to him and he said to her this he said you know my dear friend the Lord's people have got a mark everyone else can see the mark but they can never see their own I thought it was a striking word indeed in her case because everyone in the chapel could see that here was a real soul a godly soul a saint if ever there was a saint that was one indeed and yet she could never realize that she herself was a true saint of christ but they have a mark on their foreheads which they can never see themselves now a fountain of gardens oh that the

Lord might make us by his grace a veritable living force against evil and for the truth the fountain of gardens we must leave the subject our time is gone may the Lord bless the word and this precious truth to us amen to the hmm brown car ■ Ooh glass in yours hood the water this bedroom here

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