

“The Final Garden”

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Revelation 22:1-6

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” The Word of God for the People of God.

[TITLE SLIDE] Well this is it. We’ve arrived. Today we come to the end of Gardens of Scripture sermon series. If you’re a guest or if maybe you’ve been here

but you just weren't paying attention throughout the entire season of Lent and Easter we've been looking at many of the gardens that show up throughout scripture and what they each symbolize and teach us. And I think it's been a pretty good sermon series. How many of you by show of hands have enjoyed this sermon series? Yeah I think so too. By the way, if your neighbor didn't raise their hand, feel free to give them a nasty look. Just kidding.

Let's take a big picture look at the where we've been, sort of the view from 30,000 feet. **[SLIDE #2]** We started at the beginning of the sermon series in a garden that we all know. The Garden of Eden. Of course we all remember the Garden of Eden, right? It's the garden where things went south for us humans. We didn't listen to God when he created us and because of that we created all sort of brokenness in our lives and the world. And in subsequent weeks we've moved on from that garden of sin and brokenness and looked at many gardens which then point to redemption from it. We looked at the waterless garden which reminded us of our own sin and brokenness, then the well-watered garden which was all our need for God redeem and restore us, then the garden of the promised land where we looked at how sometimes we're too afraid to trust God and allow him to change us. Then of course we came to Jesus and saw how he came to offer us true redemption.

[SLIDE #3] We saw how he came in to the garden at the Mount of Olives as a sign

that he was coming as the humble servant. And then we saw him in the garden of Gethsemane preparing to die as our savior, and then crucified. And then came last Sunday as Jesus was resurrected in the garden. Wait a minute, timeout.

Did you catch that? Where was Jesus resurrected? In a garden. Now do you think then we have Jesus being resurrected in a garden? No, me either. I mean think about it. In the resurrection story Mary comes to the tomb in the garden. And then suddenly Jesus is there, tending to the garden. **[SLIDE #4]** Do you see what was going on there? The imagery is striking. She's in this garden surrounded with the tomb surrounded by death, and decay, and hopelessness, and Jesus shows up alive. Surrounded by this death, and decay, and hopelessness, Jesus is alive tending to the garden. It's symbolic. Jesus is the gardener bringing about new life. I'll say it again. Jesus is the gardener bringing about new life. And this is playing on all these other gardens pointing to redemption. The redemption prophesied through these other gardens came about through Jesus. So when we see Jesus resurrection in the garden, there more going on than meet the eye. In fact, it points us back to the first garden.

The Bible begins in a garden where because of our sin we are driven out of it, but then we have Jesus resurrected, and it ends when the work of Jesus redeeming us and we are brought back into a new, an eternal garden. **[SLIDE #5]** And that's the garden where we end our sermon series. That's the Garden of Paradise. Jesus the gardener reverses the effects of the first garden that we've been dealing with. See through Jesus we now have Eden redeemed and remade. Jesus is the bridge between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Paradise.

And now instead of a garden filled with death, and decay, hopelessness, we now image the garden teeming with life, growth, and joy. You can even see the parallels between the first garden and the garden that Jesus leads us to. Let's look at the passage. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. Now you notice a crucial point. In this passage we have a tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. What happened in the Garden of Eden? The tree didn't bring healing it brought pain to the people. So this passage the Garden of Paradise reverses this image. **[SLIDE #6]** Instead of the tree bringing pain to the world, the

tree brings healing to the world. And now, instead of the curse, this passage says there is no more curse. So again, this is a reverse of the first garden. Perhaps most important, it is the light of God that now shines and gives light to the people, while in the first passage what happened, the people tried to hide from God after they sinned. Now we could go a lot more into the symbolism of the garden of paradise. As the Bible gives us glimpses of the garden of paradise and how it reverses what happened in the first garden. But we can begin to the rich imagery that's apparent.

You know there is a temptation though when we think about this final garden though, this Garden of Paradise. A lot of time when we think about this garden we think of it as something totally foreign to us. Something from a galaxy far, far away, totally outside of our present reality. Isn't that the idea? That when we get to this garden that we're just kind of like angelic creatures, kind of disembodied. That's what a lot of people think. That's all this is sort of symbolic. But the truth is that's not the biblical witness. This imagery is earthy, it involves soil, and plants, and animals, and life. And that's because the Garden of Paradise is not in some place outside our reality. It's much closer than you think. **[SLIDE #7]** Remember the Garden of Eden was a real place. And so is the Garden of Paradise. See the vision of what is happening with this final garden is that God is renewing creation not that he taking us out of it. It's not evacuation; it's restoration. N.T. Wright

says. "Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. Jesus launched the heaven-and-earth project, and it's not going away until that day when God's work is fully done. Now we don't know how it's going to happen, but there is some sort of continuity between our reality and the reality of the final garden. That's the good news... because God is faithful to us where we are. He doesn't just give up on our world, but somehow he renews it and creates something new out of it. And I don't know about you, but I need that reminder.

Because we still live in a world that sometimes seems like it's upside down. Where there is terror and tragedy, sadness and sorrow unspeakable. There's war. There's terrorism. There are mass shootings. There is racism. There is sex trafficking. There is poverty. There are families that are broken. Can I get an amen on that one? The list could go on, from the Me Too Movement and Fake News and on and on it and on it goes... there is so much that seems wrong with our world. So I need the reminder that God is not going to throw our world away and let those things have the last word but is instead going to renew and redeem it through Jesus. And you know what? Our calling is to every day trust that promise as Christians and try to embody it in our lives. Cornel West says to be a Christian is to no matter how

tragic and hopeless present circumstances are to have a joyful attitude to stake one's life on the promise of a new heaven and a new earth."

That's the promise that we get with the Garden of Paradise. Of that very first garden restored. Yes, we began this sermon series in the Garden of Eden. But thanks to Jesus we don't have to stay there. Because Jesus is making a new garden right here and now in our midst. He is the gardener bringing about new life. And every day we are to live into it by embodying it in our lives until he comes again to complete the garden. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.