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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on
4th. April, 1951

Text: " My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds
of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies."
Song of Solomon 6.2

It is very noticeable that in this remarkable Song the emblem
of a garden in relation to the Church of Christ is frequently
used and used too as a place where the Beloved of the bride deigns
to come and hold sacred fellowship with His beloved and where the
two, in that sacred bond of union felt and enjoyed, hold
communion together. And so we may notice how that the church
invites her Beloved to come down into His garden and to eat His
pleasant fruits. In the fifth chapter there appears to be an
immediate response to that request in the words of Christ to His
church saying, "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, O beloved."

In the Scriptures there are several gardens mentioned that
may be profitable to notice. There is in the first place the
garden of Paradise, that the Lord Himself planted eastward in
Eden. We cannot begin to conceive how delightful that garden
must have been, for there in unfallen innocence man dwelt before
anything was marred by sin and by the fall of our first parents.
In that garden there was no necessity for labour to clear the
weeds and thorns and briars and nettles but all was as perfect
as it could possibly be, being the Lord's handiwork. Moreover
it was a place where God came and walked and talked with Adam.
Adam was blessed with a balanced mind and with an inherent ability
to adhere to God's commandments; but such a delightful state of
things did not long continue for all was soon marred and spoilt
by sin and the subtle, deceitful serpent who brought the awful
curse of sin and guilt into this world. And it is well to
observe the great solemnity or tragedy, if I might so term it,
of the fall of man. If we treat the fall lightly it shows that

we have but a very superficial conception of the terrible nature of sin, consequently we are the more prone to turn away from the truth as we may profess to hold it.

But not only is there the garden of Paradise mentioned in the Scriptures but there is also the garden of Gethsemane. We read that when the Lord Jesus Christ was upon earth He frequented that garden; and just before He entered upon His intolerable sufferings went there with His disciples, but did only take the favoured three into the secluded spot to view that scene of love and blood, an agonising God standing in the place of guilty, ruined, fallen man. We can link up, as we have faith and understanding, the offence of the fall and the bearing of imputed sin. The blessedness of it is in the perfecting of Redemption.

Then we read also of the garden of Joseph of Arimathaea, where he had a tomb and there, having sought the body of Jesus was privileged to lay that body in a new tomb in his own garden. Faith may contemplate that garden and view, as we may have grace, the silent tomb in that enclosure and the wonders of the resurrection morning when the triumphant Redeemer emerged from the tomb and ascended, eventually, in our own nature up into the Heavens.

Again there is also the garden of the human heart. A garden, but alas a garden that has become, so to speak, all overgrown with destructive weeds, as one hymn writer says of the heart,

"Lord, my heart, a desert vast,
Thy reviving hand requires.
Sin has laid my vineyard waste,
Overgrown with weeds and briars."

Yet in the first place the heart of man was a delightful garden where God held communion with man, and until sin brought the separation, it must have been a holy spot. But O what a state of things sin has brought about in the garden of the heart; separation, enmity, guilt, wrath, bitterness, death, all kinds of painful sins, which as discovered by divine grace and the searching light of God's truth reveal greater abominations.

Still the heart renewed by God's grace is a garden where there are beds of spices and where the fruits of the Spirit in the heart renewed by God's grace are choice fruits to the praise of that Redeemer who has washed the Church with His blood and clothed her with His righteousness. The heart, the new heart of which we read, may be compared to a fruitful garden. But O is there any fruit flowing forth from your heart as quickened and renewed by God's grace? Is there any fruit of repentance and faith and hope and love and other graces, so that the ground being prepared, the good seed is planted and has become fruitful?

Not only is the human heart thus compared to a garden, but the church of God is a garden which is at times referred to here in this remarkable Song. The church gathered together by God's invincible grace and the plants in it being cultivated and dealt with by gracious teaching and heavenly discipline, the church of God may be compared to a garden and is so compared in the Scriptures. We read in the prophecy of Jeremiah of the soul being like a watered garden where all grief and sorrow is taken away. The Gospel church is also a garden where the Lord comes and where He has His plants that are planted and tended by His good Spirit, cultivated, and where by His good providence He gathers a people together for His own praise and glory.

Well now, in relation to this garden of the church there are several points to notice. One is that a garden signifies separation. The church is said to be a garden walled around, not common ground for everyone to use and travel over as they will, but it is a place of separation. The Lord's plants, His people, are compared to "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified". But alas, there is not much separation in the professing church in these days. Instead of that, there is in the case of many professing people, a grievous tendency to go as far into the world as they can without actually bringing open reproach upon their profession. But what a mercy it is when the grace of God in its sanctifying power does separate from the world that

lieth in wickedness and gather the heart and affections unto the Lord Himself, so that there is a coming out from the world according to the Lord's exhortation "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing." If we profess to be a part of this garden, let us not defile our garments, by God's mercy, with outward inconsistency or worldly conformity, but seek grace to walk worthy the vocation wherewith we are called in all lowliness and meekness.

A garden is also a place of order. In a garden, especially if it is under the care of a trained gardener, the plants are not all just mixed and muddled up in any sort of way. They are set out in some sort of order in the garden, with some design. It is not just all in a state of confusion. And so in the church of God, in this garden, and not only in the church of God as such, but in a Gospel church. How desirable it is that all things should be done decently and in order, that each should walk in that position that God in His providence has appointed, and seek so to walk in it according to the Lord's purpose as to be useful and fruitful as a plant in the Lord's garden which is a place of order. What a mercy it is and what a goodly sight it is, even in a Gospel church, to see members walking together in the fear and grace of God, and not in a state of confusion, one against the other; to be as we read of the church in the Acts of the Apostles, walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, graciously exercised, seeking each other's good, in mutual prayer, waiting upon God and walking before Him and before each other. This garden then is a place of order.

Again, a garden is also a place of beauty, where the flowers burst forth and show their colours in their beauty. It is where the flowers are to be seen and so it is said here, "My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies." All flowers or fruit that are brought forth are the Lord's fruit, and He has a right to gather what He will and to do what He will with it. And is there

not a beauty in a garden? Some of you may be very fond of your gardens, and that is quite right and pleasant; but is not our Beloved fond of His garden, and has He not great concern for it, as to the state of it and the fruits produced in it? "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded." - I went down into the garden to see how things were and whether there was any fruit there. If He were to come down into your heart now, would He see any fruit there? Would He see the vine flourishing, active, lively, healthy, vigorous? Are these things in the heart by His grace lively enough to be noticed and to be attractive to Him? This is a place of beauty and truly there is an attraction and a beauty even with respect to Christ in His garden where He may see His people waiting for Him, walking in His ways, observing His commandments, keeping His ordinances, walking worthy, separate from the world that lieth in wickedness, and each endeavouring, so far as they may be helped, to do that which would be for the furtherance of the Gospel. As well as a place of beauty, it is a place of growth. The nurseryman, if he put seed into the soil in his greenhouse, and that seed never germinated or developed, would say, "Well, the seed is no good. It does not come forth, it does not shoot forth." So it is with a growth in grace. What use is a slip if it remains a slip? or a bud if it remains a bud? No, there must be growth. And what is spiritual growth in regard to these plants? A taking root downward and bearing fruit upward; but what growth is there in our hearts in regard to these things? Is there any real growth in a knowledge of divine things in a gracious, spiritual way, with us? Peter desired that those to whom he wrote might grow in grace and in a knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now, as to these plants here, is there a growth; is there a taking root downward and a bearing fruit upward? Are the plants in the garden developing? Is the seed coming up? Are there signs of fruitfulness? Will there be any fruit on the vine? A garden

is a place of growth. It is naturally; and so it is with regard to spiritual considerations. It is true we may feel to make very little progress. But it is a mercy if there is any real growth with regard to a knowledge of sin. You see, when the Lord deals with His people, at times He does so deal with them as to bring them into a deeper knowledge of sin, of their fall and how they are marred by it, and under a curse by it, and are separated from God by it. But He brings them also into a deeper knowledge of redemption and of divine mercy and of the forgiveness of sin, and the blessings that are provided by the Gospel.

The garden is a place of growth. But not only so, a garden is a place of retirement and reflection. Sometimes some of you may go into your gardens and sit down and reflect on things in a quiet way. This is a place of meditation and reflection. It is a secluded place. In fact it is the Lord's garden, where He calls upon the winds to awake. "Awake, O north wind and come thou from the south, blow upon my garden that the spices may flow out." Now in the text it is said that the Lord is come down into His garden to the beds of spices. What are these spices? In the fifth chapter it says "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice." This myrrh is rather particularly noticed in the Song. We understand in itself it is rather bitter and not very pleasant to taste. It is of a bitter taste, but here you see it says, "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice"; not just the myrrh alone but "with my spice." Now this myrrh is indeed a grace of the Spirit brought forth in the heart in this garden, which has a bitterness in it, which is a bitterness on account of sin, a bitterness, and yet a sweetness; a strange intermingling, as it were, of the two things. So it is when a child of God is favoured. The myrrh and the spices are gathered. The Lord accepts them, receives their confessions and grief on account of sin, and yet with that felt grief a flowing forth of the heart in love to Him "Sorrow and grief flow mingled down"; - love and grief flow mingled down. He gathers the myrrh with the spices and the honeycomb with the honey. "I have drunk my wine with

my milk." You see, He says "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk." Myrrh for bitterness, honey for sweetness, wine for strength - these may be looked upon as the blessings of the Gospel which are the meat and drink of the church of God. But more particularly and more relevantly, they refer to the graces of the Spirit that are brought forth by a gracious exercise. These beds of spices are in a renewed heart in gracious exercise before the Lord, such as confession of sin, repentance, love, faith, humility, obedience, submission, patience, and other things.

Now all these things are like beds of spices. The Lord comes and gathers them, that is notices and receives them and accepts of them. Do you feel you have anything in your heart worth noticing if the Lord should come into the garden of your heart? Or if He should come into the garden of His church, would He find there a bed of spices, praying members, repenting members, and those under the gracious exercise of the Spirit, in patience and hope and faith and love, waiting at His footstool? Would He find anything to gather that would be worth gathering? It may be a close point with us because of what we feel to have in our poor hearts, nothing but sin. But there is something but sin if we are the Lord's garden. There is, as it were, a choice spot, a fruitful spot, a bed where spices can be gathered, a fruitful place. O how good it is when the Lord so comes into His garden. In the verse before you, see, there is an enquiry. "Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women, whither is thy Beloved turned aside, that we may seek Him with thee?". Where is He gone? Gone down into His garden. He is never in a sense far away, though at times He may not be seen. He hides Himself and we may wonder where He is, feel the miss of Him and mourn His absence. And yet He is gone down into His garden to the beds of spices, to feed in His garden. There is a real communion between the Lord and His people, a communion that flows out of the union that is so sacred in its nature - a flowing together, a coming and receiving, feeding, by which here more particularly we may understand the Lord feeding

His flock or tending the plants in the gardens. He brings His own food to nourish His sheep. The food that He provides is the finest of the wheat, that is bruised corn, prepared food. His own flesh and blood, heavenly bread. All this is prepared food that that could not be received by us in the raw state. No, it must be prepared, ground in the mill; the wheat must be ground in the mill of sufferings, bitter sufferings, in order for Christ to be food to nourish His sheep.

He comes into the gardens to gather lilies. There is something very sweet about this if we could see it rightly. It can express that choice, sacred communion that may be enjoyed in public worship, that is when people are assembled together to serve Him and to worship with inward fellowship and communion of a spiritual nature, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies. He has a right to gather His lilies as He will. No plant is its own property in these gardens. "As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters." The lilies are His children and the beauty that pertains to His spiritual lilies is the beauty that Christ puts upon them. It is His own beauty, and He comes to gather these lilies. There is a gathering as it were in worship when His people are gathered together; but there is a gathering of the lilies when the Lord takes His people home to Himself. He is in a sense, continually coming down into His garden to gather His lilies, and He gathers them very sovereignly. Some are gathered young, in tender years, others in more ripe years, but they are all His lilies. He comes to gather them and we never know how soon He may come to gather this one or that one. How many of these lilies have been gathered in early life. They have looked so fair, maybe, so promising, but the Lord has come down into the garden and gathered them. It is indeed all of His mercy to gather His lilies, for all His people are taken away from the wrath to come. They are spared so much. But O, who can tell, even in a little congregation like this, who may be the next lily for the Lord to gather? He is so

sovereign in this particular. We cannot claim life. All our days are appointed by Him, and we cannot be sure of them. If we are really His children, washed and redeemed, and a part of His Church, as plants in His garden, or as here, lilies in His garden, He has a right to come and gather us, for we are His, and who can say who may be the next one even of us here? None can tell. And sometimes the Lord comes to the more unlikely ones, where life is very promising. At times we have to notice how soon strength fails and life ebbs away, and the lily is gathered. Yet they are the Lord's lilies. There is a sacred intimacy, which is known and enjoyed between the Lord Jesus and His people, that is altogether foreign to the world. The world is not a garden in this sense. O no, His church is a garden gathered out from the world's wide wilderness.

"We are a garden walled around
Chosen and made peculiar ground."

Well, are we any part of this garden? Have you and I any real reason to hope that we are plants of His planting, that He may be glorified? Or are we just weeds? There are plenty of stinging-nettles in the world, and plenty in the human heart through sin and the defilement of human nature; but are there any spices? Is there any fruit-bearing to His praise? any evidence of faith and love in the heart? the affections flowing forth to Him? Do you desire to love Him? Does your soul at times yearn for Him? Do you long for Him to come? "O when wilt Thou come unto me?" This is a garden and here are the beds of spices, confessions and prayers and all those spiritual graces that are wrought in the heart by His good Spirit.

O may the Lord look upon us. It is difficult to describe the beauty that is involved in a word like this, but it may be noticed that the Lord says earlier in regard to this feeding, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly O beloved" and would invite you to His repast. He would bring you into the banqueting-house. He has plenty of food, He has everything that your soul can need. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." You cannot want, you cannot ultimately come short, if the Lord is your Shepherd. He feeds His flock. He comes into the gardens, makes His own entertainment, invites His own guests. O for a little fruitfulness, for a little bringing forth of something to His praise. Amen.

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