

I.N.I.

Second Mid-week Lent

February 21, 2018

Genesis 3:22–24; Revelation 22:1–5

In Christ Jesus, who was first prophesied to save mankind in the Garden of Eden and who did come to give us the Garden of Paradise, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When you think of a garden you think of peace and tranquility, especially a beautiful flower garden with a sparkling river flowing through it. Scripture pictures the Garden of Eden as a place of peace, perfection, and the provision of the Lord. Into this garden God placed the crown of His creation, human beings—man and woman. It was a garden where Adam and Eve walked in the presence of the LORD, speaking to Him. However, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, sin entered into the world, and humanity was exiled from the Garden of Eden. God even placed cherubim with a flaming sword as guardians lest man would seek to return and eat of the tree of life.

Yet, from the very moment of their exile, God revealed His plan to return man to the Garden of Paradise. He told Adam and Eve of the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of Satan, defeat him, remove our sin and destroy death. That is why it was out of love that God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden so that they did not eat of the tree of life and live forever on this earth in their sinful state with disease, old age and suffering.

Eventually, God did send His only-begotten Son into this world to redeem mankind and when that took place, it was as if the gates of paradise were flung open, and man was invited into the presence of God as it was in the beginning, into the paradise of heaven. In fact Jesus said this to the repentant, believing thief on the cross, **“TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE”** (Luke 23:43). The word for “paradise” means “an enclosed garden.”

Our overall theme this Lenten season is: “Return from Exile: A Lenten Journey.” Our Journey this evening takes us from “Garden to Garden: From Eden to Heaven.”

We read our two texts for this evening: Genesis 3:22–24 and Revelation 22:1–5

A beautiful, perfect place—the Garden of Eden! God created the heavens and the earth. God created all living creatures that crawl and walk on the ground, that swim in the waters, and that fly in the air. God created man; in His own image He created them, male and female He created them. And it was very good. It was perfect. He placed Adam and Eve into that beautiful garden called Eden. Indeed, it was beautiful because it was perfect. There was no need to worry about the weather because the world was perfect and danger did not exist. There was no need to worry about anything because everything was exactly right, exactly perfect, and exactly how God intended it to be.

And the best thing was the relationship God had with His greatest of all creatures. God and man were united together in perfect unity. It was an amazing relationship. God and man walked together, talked face to face, lived in perfect peace. A beautiful, perfect place with God and man united in a beautiful and perfect relationship. The beautiful Garden of Eden, the place where God and man dwelled together in perfect harmony.

So it was in the beginning. But as we know, Eve was tempted to desire more, to be like God. The old, evil foe tempted her to question this beautiful relationship by casting

doubt on God's blessings and integrity. Satan whispered that God was hiding something from her, holding back the ability to be like Him. She believed Satan, and she ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and gave some to Adam who also ate and they tasted death.

A beautiful, perfect place was lost—paradise lost. An amazing relationship was severed. Mankind now was like God in knowing good and evil but no longer like God in His image—perfect and holy. An eternal immortality was exchanged for everlasting suffering and death. And because of Adam and Eve's sin they were driven from the Garden of Eden, and their return was forbidden by the flaming sword of the cherubim. They were exiled from a perfect place of light and beauty and were headed into the darkness, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. They were exiled, and their return was forbidden, their access to the tree of life cut off.

We were created to live forever in the presence of God now only to be exiled to a land of darkness and death far from the face of God with His light and grace. How tragic for Adam and Eve. How tragic for all of us!

Adam and Eve were exiled from the beautiful garden; exiled from before the face and presence of God; exiled and driven out into a sin-damaged world with sin-filled hearts. Sin exiles man from God. Sin exiles us from the courts of heaven, from the courts of everlasting life.

And our sin is ever before us. We cannot return from our exile by our own effort or our own strength. We cannot enter again into the presence of God by means of our own good works. We are helpless and hopeless, wandering in the darkness. We hang our heads unable to look our Creator in the face, unable to see His glory. Like Adam and Eve we too would flee and hide from God's all-seeing eyes looking into our sinful hearts and minds. We are sinners, exiled from the perfect garden, exiled from the presence of God.

We cannot return on our own. We cannot become perfect nor pay for our sins. The journey is too difficult, too demanding, too impossible. We need help. We need a Savior! We need One who will restore us to God's presence, One who will return us to the garden of paradise, One who will make peace again between us and our God.

A Redeemer, a Messiah, a Substitute, a Savior, the Christ—that is what God promised Adam and Eve as they were exiled from the Garden of Eden. God told them that the darkness would be overcome by the One who would do battle with the evil serpent. The Seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan even as He would suffer the pain of a bruised heel. The Promised One would overcome; the ultimate battle would be fought on the cross. The burden He would carry to the cross would be our sins. The sacrifice He would give would be His body and blood. Christ would suffer what we deserved—death and damnation. He would bear what we could not—our sins and shame. And He would accomplish that which was impossible for us: a return from the exile of sin and death. Jesus, dying on the cross, removed the dividing wall of hostility. The blood of Jesus, the Lamb, cleanses us from all of our sins and returns us to our God. And Jesus, the Lamb, declares to each of us, **“Someday you will be with Me in paradise”**.

So it is in our second text Revelation 22, that we read of the courts of heaven being described in words that cannot help but remind us of the Garden of Eden. Indeed, the Seed of the woman has accomplished His goal and opened the gates of the eternal garden of heaven, so that we and all believers might dwell in the presence of our God once again, gathering around the throne and singing praises to the Lamb.

We have been redeemed and restored by our King, our Savior, Jesus. He has fought the good fight in our place and overcome all that kept us from the garden. Paradise lost is now paradise won—the gates of the garden of heaven stand open before us. We who were exiled from Eden shall return through the gates of everlasting life. Indeed, the day will come when we will walk through those gates and see the Lamb on His throne. There we shall see the waters of life flowing around the tree of life. There we shall bask in the Light that is the Lamb and dwell in His presence forever.

The Apostle John wrote to the Church in Ephesus in Rev. 2:7: "**HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES. TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES I WILL GIVE TO EAT FROM THE TREE OF LIFE, WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE PARADISE OF GOD.**" ' 1

Garden to Garden—from Eden to Heaven—a return from exile to God's presence forever!

Thanks be to the Seed of the woman, our Crucified and Risen Lamb.

Amen.