

.. . ✨ . . . GARDENER OF EDEN .. . ✨ . . .

As we continue to meditate upon the death and resurrection of our Savior, I would like to shine light on a few details that are often overlooked. The Gospel authors explain how Jesus makes atonement for our sins and gives us new life, yet they also subtly reveal how Jesus' actions fulfill God's plan to restore all of creation. In particular, I want to show you how John portrays Jesus as a new Adam—a new gardener of Eden!

In his Gospel, John informs us that Jesus and his disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane after sharing their Passover meal (John 18:1). While there, Jesus was betrayed, bound, and forced from the garden. I can't help but see an echo of Genesis 3, in which Adam and Eve, betrayed and deceived by the Serpent, were exiled from the Garden of Eden as a result of their sin. Although Jesus was sinless, he willingly bore the consequences we all deserve.

As John continues, he reveals that Jesus was buried in yet another garden: "The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. And so, because it was the day of preparation for the Jewish Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there," (John 19:41-42). Three days later, Mary stood and wept by Jesus' tomb. John recounts, "She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. 'Dear woman, why are you crying?' Jesus asked her. 'Who are you looking for?' [But] she thought he was the gardener," (John 20:14-15a).

Mary's mistaken identification has often been attributed to the fact that she met Jesus in a garden. Indeed, encountering a gardener in a garden wouldn't be unusual. However, I think John conveys a deeper truth. Gardens are significant from the opening lines of Genesis to the closing verses of Revelation, representing the space in which sinless humans dwell in the perfect presence of God. Thus, I believe the identification of Jesus as a gardener must be attributed to more than the blurry eyes of a weeping woman.

Although Adam and Eve were expelled from their garden, and Jesus was buried in one, our Savior rose again and emerged into a garden, restored and reunited with the Father. Jesus became the gardener that Adam and Eve had failed to be, planting seeds of the new creation. We'll talk more on the topic tomorrow, but for now, let's pray.

Jesus, thank you for enduring the humiliation, betrayal, and death that I deserve for my sins. Thank you for giving me new life and beginning the process of restoration for all creation. Help me reflect your image as a gardener as I seek to bring life to my world. Show me how I can be an agent of healing among my fellow humans and in the natural world. In your name, Amen.

Personal Reflection: Prayerfully meditate and write down a few ways you can bring healing, restoration, and life through your words and actions. Be intentional to begin implementing your ideas today.

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Yesterday we discussed Jesus' role as a gardener—a new Adam who restores our relationship with God and plants the seeds of a new Eden. With his resurrection, Jesus inaugurates the new creation and becomes the first fruits of a new era (1 Corinthians 15:21–23). Today, we'll shift from the words of John to the Gospel of Matthew to explore the crucifixion and resurrection in more detail.

Matthew records a series of supernatural phenomena that took place when Jesus died:

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

Matthew 27:51–53

The release of God's Spirit from Jesus' body was so powerful that the ground shook, the earth burst open, and dead people returned to life. Forgive me for the comparison, but I can't help but picture an ancient Ghostbusters movie. Instead of ghosts strolling through modern-day New York City, previously dead people began walking the streets of ancient Jerusalem!

Related passages of Scripture help us understand the events to an even greater degree. More than 500 years before Christ, Ezekiel prophesied,

Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I, myself, will split open your graves, and I will cause you to rise up from your tombs, my people; and I will bring you to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your tombs, my people. Then I will put my Spirit in you, and you will come to life!"

Ezekiel 37:12–14a (my translation)

The rising of the dead from their graves was an established and expected sign that God's redemption was at hand and his Spirit was bringing new life to his people.

The ripping of the temple veil and shaking of the ground are also clear indications that God's Spirit was moving. No longer would God's presence be inaccessible to humanity, hidden behind a curtain. As Jesus released his Spirit, God's presence began to fill all of creation. His movement was so powerful that the earth literally trembled.

Paul compares such upheavals to the process of birth. The apostle explains,

Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Romans 8:20–22

Like a woman experiencing labor prior to bearing new life, the natural world experiences labor pains as we approach the birth of the new creation.

Jesus' death and resurrection were the beginning of the end. At the cross, he inaugurated the final phase of God's redemptive plan. The supernatural signs were a foreshadowing in miniature of events that will happen later on a cosmic scale. Just as the godly men and women from Jerusalem rose from their graves, everyone who has placed their faith in Christ will rise from the dead when he returns. Just as the earth shook and the rocks split apart, the entirety of creation will be shaken as it is transformed and restored to perfection. Although the day will be fearful for those who don't know God, Paul reminds us to look forward to Jesus' return "with eager hope" and joyfully anticipate the glorious freedom all of creation will experience.

Lord, thank you for willingly going to the cross to begin the final phase of redemption for all of creation. Help me walk in the fullness of my new life as I resist old habits that invite death and destruction in my life. Teach me how to live in the light of your redemptive work—with hope, joy, and expectation. Fill me with such eager hope for your return that I can't resist telling others about the new life you offer. Give me a constant awareness that the way I live now impacts my own eternity and the eternity of those I love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Personal Reflection

How can you bring a greater awareness of eternity into your daily routine? Read through your notes from yesterday and continue implementing strategies for bringing healing and restoration to the world. As you do so, consider the eternal impact of your words and actions.

