

Outside the Garden

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- [0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.
! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
I wonder if you've noticed that sometimes God seems quite far away.
Some days it feels lonely, as though God were in fact not there at all. We notice this because other days worship is joy.
Bible reading is fresh and delightful. Prayer is our every breath. In every direction we glance, we see God, and notice his love made new for us.
- [1 : 09] We've been reading in Genesis 1, 2, and 3 about life in the garden. Life in the garden is in the presence of God.
The way the garden has been described, the words and the language used, are the same words used to describe the temple later on in the story.
There is an overlapping purpose between the garden and the temple. Both are places for worship. Both are places where the presence of God is known.
Where God's presence overwhelms us. But as we've heard, we're not in the garden anymore.
In the grace of judgment, God has excluded us from the garden. So what now? Is the consequence of exclusion the end of the story?
- [2 : 22] Is that what it means? We can't live in God's story at all at any time. How can the story continue?
How can we live in the presence of God outside the garden? Well, it's good to remember it was only by grace that we humans lived in the garden at all.
We were guests invited into the presence of God by grace alone. The reality of judgment has not diminished or in any way defeated the glory of grace.
Our rebellion against our God has not changed him and has not changed his desire that we should live together with him. And so outside the garden, we find grace, amazing grace, abundant grace, present grace.
We live outside the garden in exactly the same way as we lived inside the garden, by grace alone. By grace alone. Now Adam knew Eve's wife.
- [3 : 48] She conceived and bore Cain saying, I've gotten a man with the help of the Lord. And again, she bore his brother Abel. Back in chapter one, God had commanded humanity, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
Worship, or we might say, living in God's story, sometimes they come to the same thing, is fulfilling the commands of the Lord God.
Having children is a daily miracle. It happens so often, we lose the wonder of it. Fulfilling this command requires action from the humans.

God is involved in every birth, but most often, so is a human father and a human mother. It turns out, living in God's story outside the garden can be about doing very ordinary and very common things.

Living as a family, living as a neighbor and a friend, doing the things that we think are ordinary, but in fact are extraordinary.

[5 : 09] The difference is that we can intentionally live in God's story. We can seek out his presence. We can acknowledge him and his grace at work for us.

We can notice God in the ordinary thing. Worship isn't only coming to our much-loved building, hearing wonderful music, singing and praying together.

Very often, worship is the daily round of life, doing those things that make us human, because we are human, made by God and recipients of his grace.

Our daily life continues outside the garden. This is now the only place where we can worship. This is now the only place where we can enter the presence of God.

We can't go back to the garden. We live here today, and we are called by God to fulfill his commands and live in his way today.

[6 : 21] And so how are we doing with that? How are we doing with fulfilling the Lord's commands and living our lives and being his people day by day?

Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground, and in the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions.

These two boys both bring offerings to the Lord God. This is something we do in worship. We bring offerings to our God.

But sometimes we get confused about what we're doing when we bring offerings. We forget that in Psalm 50, we read of God saying, If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.

God is not in need. There is no lack in God which is made up by our bringing an offering.

[7 : 34] Our bringing offerings is an act of acknowledgement of God and dependence upon God. We recognize our God as the one who is worthy to receive from us.

We choose to live independence. In every other area of human life, increased maturity brings independence.

But as disciples of Jesus, increased maturity brings increased dependence. We know more and more how much we need to depend upon our God.

All that we have is given by our Father. When we bring an offering, we are returning to Him something from what He has given us.

When we give sacrificially in a way that costs us, we are choosing to depend upon grace rather than depending upon what we think we have.

[8 : 42] This is the heart of worship. Near the end of 2 Samuel, King David is called to build an altar and he's told which farm to build it on and he goes down to the farmer and he says, I'm going to build an altar on your farm.

In fact, right where your barn is. And the farmer says, I will give you the barn for nothing. You are the king and you're here to worship and I will give you the barn.

And David says, No. I will buy it from you at the price. I will not offer to the Lord something which costs me nothing.

Worship is always costly. Living in the presence of God outside the garden is always costly. Not in cash terms.

Worship costs your whole life. All of it given to God. Worship is wholehearted and passionate.

[9 : 55] The pattern of bringing offerings to the Lord God begins outside the garden and continues until Christ comes or calls us home. What are you giving to the Lord your God?

Is your worship and your life outside the garden marked by dependence upon your God? And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

So Cain was very angry and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen? If you do well will you not be accepted? If you do not do well sin is crouching at the door.

Therefore, its desire is contrary to you but you must rule over it. Now, this is the part where you might be hoping that I'm going to try and explain the difference between Abel's offering and Cain's.

This, I think, is the only verse in Scripture which describes these offerings and I've got a prize for anyone who can show me where in this verse in Genesis 4 God explains why he accepted one offering and not the other.

[11 : 11] The simple fact is God doesn't tell us. There are pages and pages written of speculation about what the difference might be but that's all they are.

It is good for us to stick to what God says in his word and not go beyond what was written.

Later on in the story God will tell us at great length about the offerings we are to bring to him but he then says what he desires most is obedience and not sacrifice.

Follow Jesus. Don't go your own way. Fan into life the flame of the Spirit. Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with your God. Be content with what God tells us and do not presumptuously pry into what God hasn't told us.

The real question in this chapter is how is Cain going to live outside the garden? How will we live? Sin, the indwelling principle of rebellion against God is crouching right next to us at the door of our life longing to destroy us.

[12 : 29] What will you do next? Will you give in to sin or will you resist it? When the Lord God says to Cain if you do well will you not be accepted?

We learn it is not inevitable that Cain would sin. What will you do next? Outside the garden worship is not sinless perfection.

Worship is striving against sin. What will you do next? Will you continue with God even when he doesn't answer all your questions?

Or will you fall into the easy trap of sin? Sin gives you all the explanations you want. Sin challenges you to distrust God when he won't answer the explanation questions you want.

What will you do next? Will you trust God or will you walk in sin? sin? I know you will find this bit hard to believe but when my sister and I were young on occasion just once or twice a day we wouldn't do exactly what our mum told us.

[13 : 50] Mum would get frustrated and with increasing volume explain to us why we should be doing what we were told. perhaps you share this experience with me.

We wouldn't listen until the terrifying words were uttered. Okay do whatever you want I'm finished with you.

And the thought that mum would be finished with us terrified us and had us rushing to do whatever we could to ensure that this outcome wouldn't happen.

Outside the garden is it not our great fear that God is finished with us? That God is saying to us okay go on do what you want.

That God has given up. God knows but we hear our gracious God asking Cain where is Abel your brother? What have you done?

[14 : 55] Now God knows exactly where Abel is. He knows exactly what Cain has done but God isn't running away.

God isn't giving up. He still cares and the same is true of you and me. God knows exactly what we've done. how we've lived.

How we've turned away from him and rebelled against him and he still cares. He still loves you. The human choice to rebel against God shows absolutely no sign of changing.

Adam and Eve then Cain then Cain's family. It would be understandable if God got frustrated and gave up but God still cares.

judgment is a sign of care. God is doing something in response to our sin. God's work of judgment during this life is a warning to us that we should turn and rush back to him.

[16 : 06] We know more than Cain. We know better than Cain. God cares so much about you that he endured his son Jesus being broken on the cross.

God You don't turn to God so that he will somehow respond to you. You turn to God because he has already responded to you.

He already cares for you. Jesus has already died for you. That's why we turn again to our God. This is worship.

This is life outside the garden. knowing that God continues to care for us and love us and call us to himself and coming back to God through the cross of Jesus.

You see Cain is not driven away from the Lord. The Bible tells us Cain himself chose to turn away from the Lord. He heard God's call of mercy.

[17 : 29] He heard God's words of care but still he turned away. Don't be like that. At the end of this chapter apart from a whole lot of wonderful names that I'm sure Duncan was delighted I read.

At the end of this chapter all the signs of human industry and progress are here. A city is built. Music is created and performed.

Metal work and bronze and iron transforms human life. Verses of progress and achievement of human achievement. Verses 23 and 24 is often described as the first poem in the Bible.

Ada and Zilha hear my voice. You wives of Lamech listen to what I say. I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.

The creative genius of human poetry is first used to celebrate violence. This is not so much an eye for an eye as seventy eyes for one eye.

[18 : 46] The escalation in human achievement goes hand in hand with an escalation of human violence. violence. It seems we just get better and better at doing things and then we use those things to get better and better at being violent towards one another.

We may well advance in technology, in the arts and science, but we are not walking with God. We are not living in God's story.

Our choices take us steadily further and further away from him. There is no solution for this dissent apart from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It won't be our achievements which reconcile us to our God, only the broken body of Jesus. It isn't our wonderful poetry which brings us home to our God.

It is the poured out blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Life outside the garden is a centuries long journey of learning to depend upon Christ alone.

[19 : 56] We can't get back to God. Only God can come to us. His grace, his mercy, his care overflows towards us.

His son is sent in grace to be our saviour. This is our worship. This is our life outside the garden. God inviting us as guests to come to the cross where we kneel and worship him.

Adam and Eve have another son and Seth has a son called Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord. God. Yes, I know all about Exodus chapter 6 where it says God spoke to Moses and said to him I am the Lord.

I appeared to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob as God almighty but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I know all about Genesis 4 and Exodus 6.

If you want to talk about that later, let's talk about that later. The God of Genesis 4 is the Lord of Exodus 6. The same God, the same Lord.

[21 : 13] Our life outside the garden in the daily experiences of bereavement and childbirth, God is at work in them beside us.

The same God, the same Lord. Did you notice in verse 1, Eve testified it was the Lord who helped her get a son. And then again in verse 25, Eve testifies again that God appointed another son for her.

This is worship. All that we have, all that we will ever have is given by our God. It is at this time in verse 26 after murder and slaughter and violence and turning away from God at this time.

People began to call upon the name of the Lord. This is our hope. We can still worship outside the garden. We don't need to wait until we are fully restored to the presence of our God because our God has come to us and made himself known to us that we might call upon his name.

We don't need to wait until we have overcome sin in our own strength or until we have great achievements to boast of before the Lord.

[22 : 38] We can call upon the name of the Lord outside the garden. God's holy holy holy holy holy the presence of the Lord but until that day we call upon his name here one day we won't be outside the presence of the Lord but until that day we depend upon his grace and his mercy and the care of the Lord for us here one day we won't be outside the presence of the Lord but until that day we worship the Lord we recognize his generosity in giving to us all that we have we bring our offerings to him our whole lives in his service we strive to turn away from sin we resist temptation but always and only in the power of God's Holy Spirit which is how we know God is with us and is not finished with us one day there won't be any part of our life outside the presence of the Lord but until that day we fall down on our faces we worship the Lamb of God who takes away our sin we proclaim that salvation belongs to our God this is our life outside the garden let's pray together open our eyes Lord we want to see Jesus we want to know that he is with us outside the garden fill our lives with hope as we look upon Jesus hope of grace hope of peace hope of your love gracious God come quickly to us for we depend upon you we ask it in Jesus name

Amen