

The Sweet Peas in the Garden of Scripture

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[0 : 00] Simon Wunderland, Eddie Watts, thousands of hours of aviation experience between them. And he just thoroughly embarrassed himself. It really was, it was embarrassing.

I don't know if you've been onto either of their Facebook pages, but... Oh dear, I was on all last night trying to take it down, but... But it is, it's great to have the opportunity to come together and to not just share in fellowship, not just share in worship, but share in particular what God is saying to each of our hearts, individually and collectively.

Not just as a church here in Western Hales, but collectively as the church, the only church that exists, the Church of Jesus Christ. And Jesus told us, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail.

It's his church. We're just members. And as members, we look to him for direction. We look to him for not only direction, but what it is that he wants us to do, how he wants us to do it, where he wants us to go, and how he wants us to engage with individuals.

And when it comes to witness, we are incredibly fortunate, because we all have a unique witness. But we all have a unique circle of friends in whom we mix and wonder through, where we have opportunity to bless them through exposing them to the reality and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 31] The message this morning, you might think, is a bit disjointed. But coming from the Wild West, you can't expect anything less, can you?

If you've got your Bibles with you this morning and you want to follow along, beginning looking at Exodus chapter 3, and just the first five verses, and using that primarily as a foundation of where we're going to go today.

So Exodus chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. And we read this here. It says, Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian.

And he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.

Moses saw that though the bush was in fire, it did not burn up. So Moses thought, I will go over and see this strange sight. Why the bush does not burn up?

[2 : 41] When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush. Moses, Moses. And Moses said, Here I am.

Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. Amen.

Moses. Moses. Have you ever heard God speaking to you? Andy. Andy.

And I think to myself, I know that it's God, but I know that he's asked me to do something. I'll throw my deaf ear. Because I know he wants me to go and speak, or share, or witness, or become involved next weekend.

But my team's playing, and I don't want to miss that. And sometimes God calls to us, and we very deliberately ignore. But when Moses here engaged, he answered, Here I am.

[3 : 52] There was a willingness in his heart. And God said to him, The place where you are standing is holy ground. Do you know that the Lord has given us all, each of us individually, holy ground to stand and witness for him?

Having visited Israel, and in particular this part of Israel, it's a very dry, barren landscape. And not an awful lot grows in the desert.

Especially on mountaintops. Any growth is normally contained in a little shadow, in a valley, where the sun doesn't burn it up, and it might get some moisture.

But nothing grows in the mountaintops. It's harsh, dry, and the burning, searing heat, and sun of the noonday, would just shrivel up anything that began to take root.

Yet Moses was there, communing with God. And he looked, and he saw a bush. And fire. But it didn't burn up.

[5 : 02] Do you know, sometimes when God calls us to serve, he sends us to places that are challenging, that are difficult, that we're going to come under pressure.

But when God's in the mix, blessings are received. Whether it's in a bar on a dark mountaintop, or in the middle of a city centre, or a house and estate, or wherever it is.

But I said I was using this, kind of opening passage in Exodus, just as a foundation. And I bet, that you've never had a message, focusing on horticulture.

Well, today we'll see that change. I mean, I don't personally profess to have green fingers, although I do my best. I potter around the garden, kidding myself on, that maybe there's a Percy thrower in here somewhere.

Although my dear wife calls me a bit of a Charlie Dimmock at times. But I have a nice wee garden, nothing exotic. But where I live, the neighbours have these wonderfully kept gardens.

[6 : 14] You know the ones, the tightly mowed lawns, the beautiful stripes going in different directions, you get two-tone grass. Beautiful. Every bush is green and lush.

The flowers are vibrant. Colourful. And I think, my garden looks just as good as theirs, in the middle of winter, under six inches of snow.

The grass is always greener on the other side, isn't it? Have you ever felt like that? You look at somebody else, a life of others, and you reason that if only I had been dealt a better hand in life, well, my grass would be just as green as theirs.

And if only the location of my house and garden was all a bit better, it'd get a wee bit more sun, and my grass would be lush and green, my bushes would be so beautiful and vibrantly colourful. If only. Then we look at their lives, and we think, if I had only the same breaks in life, the same chances, the same opportunities as them, well, maybe my life would have turned out a bit better.

[7 : 23] Maybe I could have got a house and a lovely house in that state. Maybe I could have got a good job with a good salary and have nice holidays. At least when I packed my case, I would make sure everything was in it.

Maybe, just maybe. But we so often base our lives on ifs, buts, and maybes. If only this would happen, then life would be so much more colourful.

But that happened, and it undermined every opportunity and every thought that I ever had. And maybe, if I win the lottery, or maybe, if I get picked for promotion, my life would be so much better. And we spend so much time living our lives based on the ifs, and buts, and maybes. We miss the blessings of the here and now. Moses was on the mountaintop, and he saw, and he was inquiring, and God called to him, and he went, and God sees us standing in holy ground.

And we can only stand in holy ground if we're paying attention to what God's saying to us. If we are alert, eyes and heart open and receptive, when God speaks to us, we don't need to be focusing on the ifs and the buts and the babies.

[8 : 37] We focus on the here and now and what God is asking us to do, where he's asking us to go, all these wonderful things that we could miss. I would like to think I don't have a jealous bone in my body.

I would like to think that. At the start of the flowering season this year, where we live, we live at the top of the hill, and we've got a fence at the back, and there are deckings behind it.

And I came wandering across my garden aimlessly, and I came up to the fence, and I had a wee peep over the fence. And the flowers in my neighbour's garden were stunning.

Absolutely glorious. And my grandfather, my late grandfather, was a great gardener. And the one thing that he excelled at was growing sweet peas.

You ever tried to grow sweet peas? No, so were I. But I looked over the fence, and it was the most magnificent display of sweet peas that I had ever seen.

[9 : 47] They were tall, full of colour, vibrant, healthy. And I looked at mine, and I thought, if only I could, if only, if only my garden was in a better position.

But it's not. And maybe if I take them and put them in pots and move them down there. The ifs and the buts and the maybes. The jealous heart bubbling up.

I want my sweet peas as good as his, if not better. So God took me aside. I've got a man cave around the back. And it's, I think it's the bane of my wife's life.

Because I can get there for hour after hour and read and listen to the radio. But in this particular afternoon, God took me in and sat me down, and he says, let's have a wander through the garden of Scripture.

Let me reveal to you the sweet peas that I speak of in Scripture.

[10:57] And it's not for me to argue with God, but, well, we had a wee bit of a different opinion. I says, I've read your word from cover to cover many times, Lord.

And I've yet to see a sweet pea. So he sat me down, and together, as we went through the garden of Scripture, slowly but surely, the Lord revealed the sweet peas of Scripture.

And I believe that the Lord showed me, and although I'm quite sure there are more, but he showed me three specific sweet peas in the garden of Scripture. 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 15 and 16, we read this.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

But for that very reason, I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display, his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

[12:12] And I felt justified. God was telling me, I knew the worst of sinners. He said to me, Andy, look at your heart, examine your heart, look at your life, examine your life.

Where have you went wrong? Where have you doubted? Where have you deliberately sinned? Look at your life. Have this aspect of self-examination and I will reveal to you the most wonderful of sweet peas.

John chapter 3, verse 16, the most famous and most widely quoted verse in the whole of the Bible. John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And whether we are the good, the bad, or the ugly, Jesus offers eternal life to all people regardless of where we are, where we've been, what we have done or indeed what we are still doing, Jesus offers eternal life.

And in this portion of the garden, the first sweet pea was revealed. Jesus is the people's saviour.

[13:41] Jesus is the people's saviour. Universally, race, colour, creed, doesn't matter what your position is, financial, economically, whatever.

Jesus is the people's saviour. And there's unequivocal acceptance for all who would turn from sin and turn to him. Jesus is the people's saviour.

The uncontented, God kept on taking us through the pages of scripture exploring this beautiful garden in full technicolour. Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20.

And we read, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. and although we weren't physically crucified in Calvary's cross, that was the preserve of Christ himself.

[14:52] But it was our sin that was nailed to his cross. And when we have accepted Christ as our personal saviour, having repented fully of our sins with sincerity of heart that has never been experienced in our lives before, when we confess our sins at that level to self.

And Christ lives and dwells within us. We no longer live that sinful life. Christ lives in me. It was through his love. It was through his sacrifice.

It was to draw humanity back towards himself, back towards the throne of grace, into that most intimate of relationships, a communion with a creator, God, through the sacrifice of his son, the Lord Jesus and Calvary's cross, that the second sweet pea was revealed.

We have a personal saviour. Personal. Think of that for a minute.

Jesus died for you. And if you were the only sinful creation that was ever made, that was enough. I was enough. You were enough. It's a personal relationship.

[16:19] Your relationship with Christ is unique. He died for us as individuals. Although we've seen that he was the people's saviour, he is a personal saviour.

how incredible is that? A God in whose image we are made. A relationship that we willingly and deliberately broke.

that he wants that personal relationship with each of us. And that's why we can sing, thank you Jesus, thank you Lord for saving me.

we have a personal saviour. But discontent, discontent, we turn back to scripture. And as we meandered our way through these beautiful gardens, we landed in Hebrews chapter 7 and verse 25 to the end of 27.

[17 : 27] Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need, one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens, unlike the other high priests.

He does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins of the people, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

self. You see, Christ didn't save us just a little bit. Christ didn't just save us for today and then have to re-save us tomorrow and repeat it again and again through re-saving us.

Ministers can't save us. Pastors can't save us. The Christians are sitting next to you cannot save you. Going to church cannot save you.

Doing good works and good deeds can't save you. Saying and doing the right thing cannot save you. So what can save us?

[19 : 03] Nothing. Nothing. But the blood of Jesus. Nothing. But the sacrifice of Christ himself.

He came. He died. He rose again. He dealt with all the filth from our sin-infested lives. Because of his love for us.

Because of his desire to draw humanity back into that intimacy of relationship with himself. love.

And in this the third sweet pea is revealed.

Jesus is a perfect saviour. Jesus is a perfect saviour.

We cannot be measured by what appears to be greener over the fence. We cannot be measured by the achievements of others. We need to flourish where we have been planted.

[20 : 13] we cannot live a life based on these ifs, buts and maybes. We need to. In fact, we must do.

We must stand on our own appointed holy ground. Just as Moses did at the scene of the burning bush. for some of us, our appointed holy ground will indeed be in places like Moses.

For some, it may be in the house and estates of here and western hills or some other part of the world. You see, it's not about waiting for the snow so that we look the same as everyone else.

We must rise up and be the people that the Lord has called us to be. We are unique, one of a kind, known and knitted together in our mother's womb, saved by the sun, spirit-filled and set apart to flourish where we have been planted.

The display of sweet peas was absolutely magnificent, but in closer inspection, each of the bloom each of the leaves, each of the stems were unique.

[21 : 44] They twisted and pointed and directed in different ways over different thicknesses and heights, just as we are. But there was an aspect of similarity that I don't think I'd ever appreciated before.

the aroma from the flowers was exactly the same. It didn't matter what plant you went to and what flower you went to, the scent, the aroma was the same.

of Christ. Whether we are growing in a beautiful show garden, pushing between the cracks in a bomb site, our aroma is that of Christ, and that is what attracts people to him, not to us, not to a denomination, not to a particular church.

The aroma of Christ is what attracts people to him, and we need to be sincere in our hearts to allow the Lord to plant people where he wants to plant them, so that he receives the glory that is due his name.

Our aroma must be fully fragrant, irrespective of circumstance, peril, danger, or threat. By now, I thought that the journey through the garden of scripture was complete, but it wasn't.

[23 : 25] He wanted to reveal one final sweet pea. Philippians chapter 3 verse 14 where he does, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

You'll have seen that wonderful little math video there of the Olympics, and many of us will have watched the Olympics from the Olympics. Years and years of preparation, years and years of training and sacrifices from all the athletes and all the participants, all with one objective, they wanted to win the gold medal.

four years, eight years of preparation and training, giving up this, that and the next thing so that they could compete for that gold medal. It begins again next Wednesday when the Paralympics start

again in Paris.

And I'm sure that the same time and effort and energy was put in from each of these athletes. countries. But let's look at math just for a second.

Within MEF, right since the very beginning in 1945, we as an organisation have had the desire to see as many people as possible to enter the race so that all achieve the prize.

[25 : 05] Entering a race where the prize is not a gold medal. No glory in coming second. Everybody wants to be first.

Everybody wants a lucid gold medal to go down in the annals of history as the best in their particular sport or discipline. But as we share our faith, as we witness and evangelise wherever the Lord has planted us, we want to point people to him.

We want to see them enter that race. A race where the goal is eternity. The prize is the Lord himself.

And it's in that that MEF unashamedly say to people, come along and help us. Give, pray, serve, go. Allow us to expose as many people to Christ as possible so that they can enter the race.

You see, it's not the ministry of MEF. It's not the ministry of any particular denomination. It's the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 18] To witness and to evangelise and to lead people into the presence of Christ. And it's the aroma of Christ that will attract people to him, not through anything we do. Yes, it's wonderful to get involved and engage in all these external activities, but if we do that, we need to be carrying the aroma of Christ in our actions, our words and our deeds, so that people see and hear Christ through us.

And as we do that, we will see people enter that race. We will see people move from the depths of darkness into an incredible light of salvation.

Moving from a point of ignorance to knowledge of a creator God who desires to have a relationship with them as individuals. Philippians chapter 3 and verse 12.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward a goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 53] I love quotes, and I often quote Tozer and C.S. Lewis, and C.S. Lewis says, you cannot go back and change the beginning, but you can start from where you are and change the ending, change the ending.

I don't know where anybody is in this church, I don't know where you are in relation to your personal engagement with Christ as a personal saviour. You might be going through some incredible, challenging, and difficult times in your life.

Your faith might have been wandered, you might be here this morning out of a sense of duty, custom, or we do this every week for a better goal. If that's you this morning, I implore you, speak to some in the leadership, get prayer, get your heart and your soul restored into that intimacy of relationship that Christ paid an incredible price in Calvary's cross for.

If you're here this morning and you've never made a decision to accept Christ as your own personal saviour, forget what's behind you, that's gone.

If there's a chain anchoring you to your past, Jesus is the key. He will unlock that burden and see it drift into the distance.

[29 : 17] And all the bondage and the fetters that hold you back will be released and you will just float right into the arms of Jesus. That is the prize.

So in conclusion, we'll look at not just the three sweet peas, but the four sweet peas. Jesus is a people saviour.

Jesus is a personal saviour. Jesus is a perfect saviour. And when we understand all that and apply it to our lives, then we see that Jesus is the prize.

Jesus is the prize. And whether we are serving with math in some far remote corner of the world, whether it's the church here reaching out to the community around them in Western Hills, he is the people saviour, personal saviour, perfect saviour, and Jesus is the prize.

In Christ alone, my hope is found. In Christ, hope is delivered. Hope is delivered to those who we might look on as being lost causes.

[30 : 47] but in Christ's eyes, there's no such thing as a lost cause, because that's the reason he went to Calvary's cross, because we're all lost causes.

And without Christ, we were heading and hurtling towards a lost eternity. But when our hope is in Christ, we're assured of not a gold medal or a silver medal or a bronze medal, we're assured the prize of Christ in a personal relationship, something that sets us apart and allows us to enter through the gates of heaven, into the eternal arms of Christ, because of everything that he has done.

I don't know of you this morning, but I think that is wonderful, that we have a relationship with the creator God, and in that relationship, he's chosen to use us to be his witnesses, to stand on our own appointed holy ground, proclaiming the gospel, proclaiming the gospel into the hearts of the lost, and he's invited us to celebrate with the angels in heaven, as people come to faith.

If you've yet to come to faith this morning, reach out and receive Jesus. He will take your burdens, he will lighten your load, he will fill you to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, and you can be assured of a prize of eternity, because of Calvary's cross.

Let's pray. Our Lord and Heavenly Father, again we do thank you for the wonders of your Holy Scripture, the way that you continue to talk to us through the simple things of life that come across our path.

[32 : 43] But when it comes to salvation, Father, that is the most important thing, and we pray, Father, that you would give us a courageous boldness to be these ones, witnesses that you require us to be, to stand in their own appointed holy ground, and to go to the places and the people that you have asked us to do.

We don't want to wrap people up in fancy words and doctrine and theology. We just want to tell people that God loves them, that he is their Savior, and that he offers a prize.

So fill his father, send his father, father. And we ask this all for your glory and in and through the name of Jesus. Amen. If you haven't filled out your little boarding passes, we want to take you on a journey.

You don't have to pack a case or indeed look at your passports. It's a virtual flight of math around the world, five destinations over 12 months. Where are we going now?

Do you know, my wife has said to me, your memory is getting so bad, Andy. I'm going to start writing your name inside your jacket. So, my name is Martin Spencer.

[34 : 04] Where are we going this morning? Fill out your boarding pass, give it to me, and we're going to take you to South Sudan, Tanzania, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, and your final destination?

Well, that's a surprise. The only way you'll find that out is if you fill it out. So, do come and speak to myself and my wife or James after the service, and we can tell you a wee bit more about it. Bless you. Thank you. There we are, on a plate.

Let's stand and sing. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. Let's sing together. great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father.

There is...