

A Grave in a Garden

by Dr. Walter L. Wilson

"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:41).

It is generally thought that the Lord Jesus was crucified on a barren, rough hill, covered with rocks and strewn with graves. This Scripture indicates that such was not the case. Calvary's Cross was erected in the midst of a garden. It was a rich man's garden, and therefore must have been very beautiful and attractive. This garden was the property of Joseph of Arimathaea, and it is recorded of him that he was rich and honorable, and was a counsellor by profession.

Perhaps Joseph had made this garden for his vacation pleasures. No doubt it was filled with beautiful flowers, lovely shrubs, winding walks, and other delightful projects of nature, which would make this a garden indeed wherein he might take his friends for recreation. A rich man would certainly not have a barren, rocky spot and call it a garden. No doubt he had spent much money and much time on this enterprise, so that he was delighted with the prospect of taking his several friends through the grounds.

In this beautiful place a grave had been constructed out of solid rock. It was a new sepulchre. No one had yet been buried there, and probably it was located away among the shrubs and bushes, so it might not detract from the beauty of the landscape. It is likely that Joseph planned to be laid there after his life had been spent and he was forced to die. I am quite sure that he never intended that the Lord Jesus, who was "despised and rejected of men," would ever lie in that grave. It was not made for the Christ. It was not intended for Him. I am sure that it never entered into his imagination that one day the loveliest Man in the world would be placed in that tomb by the darkest deed on earth.

No doubt, my friend, you are building a garden, too. Most men are building gardens for their joy and delight. Some make gardens out of their business. They plant new ideas and cultivate them earnestly. They seek to trim out unprofitable items, and to install methods and merchandise that will produce dividends. Others make a garden out of their sinful pleasures. There are some who make their garden out of the home life, or the lawn, or the house needs, or the auto. Is there a grave

in the garden which you are building? Have you planned for a grave there? Perhaps you have made a grave in your garden where you may carefully lay away the Lord Jesus!

It may be that the making of your garden can only be accomplished by getting rid of the Lord Jesus. The plants in your garden may be sinful pleasures or worldly amusements. The guests in your garden may be those who despise the Lord Jesus, reject His Word, and refuse His authority. Of course, when this is the case, you must crucify Christ and carefully lay Him away where He cannot disturb your plans or uproot your plants.

Two Notable Gardens

Adam and Eve were driven out of their garden to die. The Lord Jesus entered into a garden to suffer on His way to Calvary. Sin, the sin of Eve, entered into that first garden and brought with it sorrow, suffering, and sighing. In the second garden, where the Saviour entered, sin entered also, but it was your sin and my sin, and sorrow entered with it. You cannot expect a garden without a grave. This world is like a thicket; you cannot get through without being scratched. If you are building a garden, you will find that thorns and thistles will be there, trouble will come from many sources, the flowers will be scorched by the hot winds of adversity. You may find there the graves of your hopes and ambitions.

There is a grave in every garden because every one must die, and each one who dies always dies in the midst of his garden, whatever that garden may be. In some of these gardens a grave has been deliberately dug for the Lord Jesus. There are those who know very well that they cannot have a garden such as they want with Christ in it, so they build a sepulchre and carefully put Him away out of their lives, so that His presence may not disturb their garden building nor their pleasures. There are those who build gardens in their lives with no intention of leaving the Saviour out of that garden, but as they proceed in the building of it they find that they want things there that He would not approve of, and so they deliberately set about to build a tomb to put Christ out of the way.

May I ask you, my friends, have you ever done anything like this? I know you are building a garden. Are you planning to have the Lord Jesus in that garden with you, or are you crucifying Him and burying Him out of your sight?

Let me tell you of a few people I have known who built as I have described and buried the Saviour there.

A Successful Architect

I have a friend whose garden of pleasure expressed itself in the designing of attractive buildings. He succeeded splendidly for a while, until reverses caused him to lose all his assets. One day this man visited one of his unfinished structures eight stories high. He viewed the unfinished work, realized how hopeless was his chance of finishing the apartment, so he climbed to the top and jumped off. There was a grave in his garden.

A Busy Manufacturer

A certain friend decided to make a garden out of his business. He was a worker in cloth and decided to bend all of his efforts towards building up a fine, profitable enterprise for his family. He deliberately set about making his garden as attractive and as profitable as possible, but without Christ. He laid Jesus away in the tomb of his forgetfulness. He deliberately put away the Saviour, so that there would be no mention of His Name in the garden of his factory. The Lord permitted him to do it, and this friend is still struggling with barrenness and rocks and weeds, for his garden has not prospered as he had hoped. He has neither a garden nor a God.

A Beautiful Young Wife

At the close of one of my services in one of our western cities, a lovely young lady, about thirty-two years of age, came to me with a beaming face and heart overflowing with joy. I had spoken of God's rich grace to men and His provision for their fullness of joy. The message had been a delight to her heart, so as she came to me radiantly, she said, "Dr. Wilson, I am enjoying now the blessing you have mentioned. I believe that I am the happiest woman in this entire state. I do not know of one thing that could add to my happiness. I have a lovely husband. He is attached to me and the children. I love everything about him and he loves everything about me. He loves his home and he loves his children. He has a good income, quite sufficient for all our needs, and he is laying aside something with which to educate the children as they need it. I have just the kind of home I had always wanted as a girl. I have beautiful rugs, just the kind I had always wished for, beautiful pictures on the wall with lights over them, lovely china and a baby grand piano. Out in the yard I have a gazing ball (I always admired them as a girl), and I have a goldfish pond and a lily pond. Doctor, you are looking at the happiest girl on the earth." Hers was a garden in which there seemed to be no grave.

A few weeks after this I received a telephone call from that lovely friend. Her heart was broken, her voice was choked with emotion as she begged me to come to see her. Death had come into that home suddenly. Her sweetheart had been stricken with pneumonia and after three days' fight for life he was taken from her to be with the Lord, for he was a saved man. Helen was left a widow with a precious little boy of seven and a beautiful girl of ten. There was a grave in her garden that she did not know about. She had not planned on death coming in. She had made no provision for burial in that scene of beauty and pleasure. She could not go back into that home again, and wanted my counsel and advice.

"Why do you not go back into this lovely little home, my sister?" I asked. "It is such a delightful place. It is so beautiful, and it is just what your heart wanted." She replied, quickly, "I cannot go back, Dr. Wilson. I cannot bear to see the chair in which he sat, or the books he read, or the clothing in the closet, or the slippers he wore. I can never again walk those rooms where I walked arm in arm with him."

Do you not see, beloved, that the garden which she had carefully prepared lost its charm when she found there was a grave there? You will find a grave in your garden, too. Are you ready for it? Are you prepared for a smash-up of the beautiful preparations you are making for a life of pleasure?

A Young Business Man

Another case I will mention is somewhat different. It was the case of a fine young man who desired to build a garden in the jewelry business. I had often spoken to him about the welfare of his soul and urged him to accept the Saviour. He always listened attentively and courteously, but constantly refused to become a Christian.

One day he said to me, "Doctor, I appreciate your interest in my welfare and am glad that you care for my spiritual life, but I have made a decision which you should know."

"What is it, Sam?" I said. "You know I wish only your greatest welfare both for time and for eternity. What have you decided to do?"

He replied slowly and with much emphasis, "I have decided that I will bend every effort to my jewelry business and make a success of it. Then when I have accumulated a net worth of \$50,000.00 I will give serious thought to your message and will become a Christian."

This message brought sorrow to my heart for I esteemed the young

man most highly and felt confident that I had lost him for the Lord. I said in reply, "Sam, I am deeply sorry to hear you say that. It may be that the Lord will turn from you and will decide that He does not want anyone who so lightly rejects His mercy and so carelessly hears His call. I hope that you are successful, but I do hope that you will not lose your soul through the effort. I cannot say that Christ will be ready to receive you when your hour of necessity arrives."

Sam did throw himself fully into his new business enterprise. He was a good jeweler, made friends easily, saved his money carefully, and gradually built up a very attractive little business. He was married but had no children. As the profits increased he invested them in a beautiful new cottage-home about one mile out of the city. There he gave to his companion all the desires of her heart. He furnished the house with beautiful rugs, attractive pictures, a baby grand piano and expensive china.

The yard was made into a beautiful garden. There were fragrant flowers in profusion, a gazing ball and a lily pond. There was also a fish pond and a rock garden. No effort or money was spared to make this the most attractive garden in that section.

One night he and his wife attended a show at the motion-picture theatre. It was quite late when they left and it was near midnight when they arrived at the home, but to their amazement it was only a pile of ashes. A fire had completely wrecked the house and its contents. The yard was destroyed. The flowers were trampled down, and what had been a garden was now a grave, over which they wept in deep sorrow.

Sam called me on the telephone to tell me of his loss, but then he said, "Doctor, I have it fully covered with insurance and tomorrow I will apply for a settlement when I obtain the policies from my lock box at the bank."

The next morning about 10 o'clock the telephone rang again, and I heard Sam's voice filled with great grief as he told me that all of the insurance policies had lapsed and that there was not one penny available for the new home. His heart was crushed, for a great, dark shadow had fallen athwart his path.

But he determined to work harder than ever and to make up his losses by increased profits. Shortly after he had returned to his labors with new zeal, a cough developed and his family doctor, who made an examination said, "Sam, you have a very rapidly-developing tuberculosis of the lungs. You must leave this city at once. To remain is most dangerous and will prove fatal. Get rid of your business and

go."

Thus another dark shadow clouded his horizon. The grave was deepening. The shadows were lengthening. The garden of his heart was gone. He sold out his business for almost nothing and left for the west.

On the way he stopped to see his aged mother, a devoted Christian, who had constantly kept her boy before the throne of God in prayer. While sitting at the breakfast table the wise mother tuned in the radio to a Bible lesson which I was giving that morning on the subject, "The Three Alabaster Boxes." As Sam listened to the message concerning the three woman who gave their hearts and lives to the Lord Jesus his soul was deeply touched. At the end of the sermon I urged all of my listeners to go at once to Christ Jesus and trust Him. Sam left the table and went to his bedroom. In a few minutes he returned with tears streaming down his face.

"Mother," he said, "I have accepted Jesus Christ this morning and I am saved."

Sam had not realized before that there was a grave in his garden, but there he found it. He had buried Christ to get rid of Him. He had buried the Bible and never read it. Then his garden was wrecked and he was left with nothing but the hollow memories of the garden that used to be.

Let me urge upon each one of you to ask your heart whether you, too, would try doing as this young man did? Would you deliberately shut the Lord Jesus out of your plan and program, burying Him out of sight, so you can go on in your own way and do just what you please? Beloved, if you do it, then when you need Him, you will not have Him. When you call for Him, He may not appear. Christ wants to be on the throne of your heart. Christ calls for your loyal allegiance, and your devoted affections. He will only do you good and never harm. He will always bring you a blessing and not a curse. Christ will always be your Friend and not your enemy. Trust Him at the beginning of your life and you will be saved from many sorrows at the end of your life.

A Prominent Showman

May I relate another case in which a very prominent circus owner was brought face to face with the Lord Jesus in his garden? The friend had built up a great show, using a number of railroad cars to transport it from city to city. It was his ambition to own the largest railroad show outside of the "combine." However, he did not bring the Saviour into

his plans, for Christ would hardly fit into such a program. We were having lunch together one day when I presented to him again the precious promises of God's grace. He listened attentively, even earnestly. The Spirit of God was working in his heart deeply. His mind was taken up with the great circus he had to transport, the many animals, wild and strange, many wagons, bands, multitudes of uniforms, large tents and much equipment for putting on the show. He thought of his winter quarters, a farm, which he had bought and paid for. He thought of the great name he had built up for his show around the country. Having considered all of this he turned to me and said, "Walter, I would be ruined if I took the Lord Jesus. I know nothing but the show business, and could not make a living from anything else. I must reject Jesus. I cannot take Him and I will not."

My friend had suddenly built a tomb and buried the Saviour there. The One who would have been his best Friend was laid away out of sight. The One who would have redeemed him was deliberately rejected and placed in a tomb where he would never be seen again. Not a long time after this occurred, my friend lost his show, lost his farm, and lost his savings. He had nothing left.

Beloved, how is it with you? Are you doing as this friend did? May I ask you to consider carefully what you will do when the garden withers, the flowers have dropped and died, the fruits of love have disappeared, and the thorns and thistles have overgrown the hills and valleys that you have planned to be a garden?

A Brilliant College Professor

A college professor of my acquaintance was unusually brilliant in his chosen field. His skill and knowledge gave him an enviable position in the colleges of the Middle West. His garden was a garden of original research and of brilliant teaching. One day as I passed the college, I saw him seated on a bench in the front yard of the school. I sat down beside him and said, "Professor, I am delighted with the progress you have made in your profession. I have heard your name well spoken of and your ability highly praised whenever I visit other colleges. You have gained a wonderful position in your field of labor. Doctor, what is the Lord Jesus to you?"

My friend was smoking a cigarette, as he was constantly doing, and he replied, "I think it is utter foolishness. Christianity belongs to old women and children. I have no interest in it whatever. My whole life is centered on becoming the best informed man on my subject in the United States. I want to be so good in this field that the best colleges

will beg for my services at a salary which I will name myself."

That was the garden that my friend had chosen to make. He did not know that there was a grave in his garden. Life was attractive to him. His profession allured him. Great opportunities beckoned to him, and he followed fully.

This professor not only smoked cigarettes continually, but drank whiskey rather freely. These two enemies were digging a grave right in the center of his garden. As the summer passed, these habits fastened themselves upon him, and dragged him down as two dogs at the throat of a deer. On the opening day of the college, he was in the grip of delirium tremens. His mother would not permit him in the home, and in the darkness of the barn behind his home, he died in desperate distress. There was a grave in his garden. He crucified Christ and laid Him away lest he should be disturbed, and then did not get to live to enjoy his Christless garden.

Are you pursuing this path, my friend? Are you trying to make a garden without the God of the gardens? Do you expect to have the flowers and fruits of love, joy, and peace without the Lord from whom these blessings must come?

A College Athlete

It may be that your garden is one of physical prowess. In a great college in the Middle West there was an athlete of unusual power and ability. He captured many trophies and won many medals. His was a garden of excellency in athletics. He had no time for Christ, so he buried Him out of sight. He crucified the Lord Jesus and got rid of Him. He would rather have the "Varsity" letter than the smiles of the Saviour. At the height of his success, a cough developed. Doctors ordered him to the hospital. The heart that had been overtaxed on the track collapsed. The lungs that had been under such a terrific strain from the violent exercises failed. His case grew rapidly worse, and he came to an untimely end at the age of twenty-seven. There was a grave in his garden.

In your garden make sure that you exalt the great Gardener who gave us such fragrant flowers, precious perfumes, delightful colors, and all the blessings of life. He will make you like a watered garden: "And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not"

(Isaiah 58:10, 11). If the Lord Jesus is accepted and enthroned, He will fill your garden with beauty, peace and rest.

Joseph of Arimathaea saw his garden turned into crucifixion grounds. He saw the most beautiful place around Jerusalem become the scene of the darkest deed in human history. Wicked men came into this place of beauty and there they crucified the Lord of glory. Will it be so in your life? Beloved, may I plead with you to enthrone the Lord Jesus? Do not crucify Him. Crown Him with your loyal affection and trust. Do not pierce Him with the thorns of your denial and rejection. If you make Christ Jesus your own He will make you His own. If you welcome Him into the throne-room of your heart and life, He will welcome you into the throne-room of heaven. Will you do so? Do it now?

Copied for www.WholesomeWords.org from *A Sure Remedy Prescribed by the Doctor...* by Walter L. Wilson. Chicago: Moody Press, ©1938. (The Moody Colportage Library, no. 173).