

Why We Evangelize

Extending God's Garden

Aaron Rosa

A predominant theme of the Hebrew scriptures is that of the Garden of Eden, a place of God's presence on Earth where humans live in complete dependence on God. Man's purpose, shelter, food and relational needs are all provided abundantly by a loving God. It is a place where humanity regularly sees the human form of their Creator who is intimately involved in their lives. The purpose given to Adam and Eve is to enlarge the Garden (Gen 1:26-28) and push it out and expand it to fill the wilderness Earth, gradually filling the Garden (and eventually the world) with a civilization reflecting the goodness, abundance and relational closeness of God with His people.

After thousands of years of humanity attempting to create a Garden of their own, God chooses a man named Abraham to plant a new Garden. This Garden will once again be filled by a humanity dependent upon God, in a covenant relationship with God, and for the ultimate purpose of God...to bless the entire world (Gen 12:2-3) and fill it with a civilization reflecting the goodness, abundance and relational closeness of God with His people.

The stories following the Exodus are stories of God bringing His people into a new, literal Garden (Deut 11:12-13), providing them with a solution for their sin problem through the priesthood, speaking directly with his people through the prophets, and reigning visibly over his people through His chosen kings. But Israel again rejects the Garden task, becoming worse than the surrounding world (2 Kings 21:9), and very much not a blessing to the world. They fail to fill the world with a civilization reflecting the goodness, abundance and relational closeness of God with His people.

As God's chosen gardeners languished in scattered captivity, they grappled with the words of the prophets who reiterated God's promise to bless the world through Israel. The reality of their exile and heart-level inability to love God faithfully seemed to preclude any hope of this New Creation world, after all...if they, with the priesthood, prophets and king of God could not fulfill God's purposes, what hope had any of humanity?

It is into this abandoned Garden that God was born to Earth in the person of Jesus, Himself a personified Garden. A place where God and man live in relational intimacy, where the physical needs and spiritual purpose of humanity are cared for through dependence on Him. Through Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, those who believe in Him become gardens (John 7:37-39). The last Adam had at last returned to fulfill the covenant promise of Abraham, through Jesus, the offspring of Abraham, the entire world would be blessed. In the language of a world dominated by empires, the Garden had become a Kingdom... a Kingdom of Heaven.

After Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and ascension, the heart problem lamented by Israel had been forever fixed. The gardening-enabling Holy Spirit empowered those who believed to share this good news! The work of evangelism became the original creation work, each soul reached became a new outpost on the frontiers of an ever widening garden. Christ's followers walked into a world filled with overgrown, tangled and inaccessible lives. They cleared fields with preaching, tamed overgrown thickets by hacking demonic vines, and made desert areas fertile by channeling the life-giving power of the Word.

When you see a struggling coworker overwhelmed by life, kids and bills, do you see an overgrown garden in need of a tending? When you see a self-harming friend overwhelmed by darkness, do you see their mind paralyzed by twisted vines? Is there a college student with budding questions about Jesus who needs some potting soil and daily watering?

The work of evangelism is the redeemed garden work. Seasons pass, sometimes we labor under a punishing sun in dusty earth, and sometimes we sit in a cultivated garden on a temperate day. Rest becomes not just inactivity, but the joy of seeing cultivated beauty around us. As the Good News of Jesus' work fills the earth, what follows is a world filled with a civilization reflecting the goodness, abundance and relational closeness of God with His people.

Reflection Questions

- How does seeing God's kingdom as an expanding garden affect our understanding of Jesus' mission to reclaim the earth?
- Who are some "gardeners" who cultivated God's kingdom in your life? How did they impact your life?