

# ***The Garden and the Spring***

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It was over forty years ago, and I was young, but I have never forgotten the pleasant experience of the day. It was blistering hot and the Bunder Road was long and uncomfortably crowded as I made my way into the Indian City. Unexpectedly I saw a little gate on the other side of the road, with a wrought iron inscription: "Mahatma Ghandi Gardens." Crossing the busy street, I passed through the gate and found myself in a most delightful little garden, as the sign had promised, walled in from the busyness outside.

Strangely enough, though so near to such a well-used thoroughfare, I was alone there. Not even a gardener was in sight. Finding a bench in the shade of a fragrant tree, I just sat back and soaked up the relief this little sanctuary provided. Water, sprayed on the grass, had kept it unusually green in the hot Indian summer. The plants too were glistening with moisture. The air was heavy with the sweet fragrance of many blossoms. Orchids nestled in the branches of tropical trees. The sound of the water bubbling here and spraying there was almost as refreshing as a shower bath. Birds chirped contentedly and flew from branch to branch.

There are few places of respite so pleasant as a watered garden. This is the picture of the human soul as the Lord desires it to be. We read this in (Isaiah 58:11). The people to whom those words were addressed were beautiful in many ways. Certainly the Lord thought so. He gave them a generous approbation and testified to five outstanding qualities which He appreciated in them. Their habits were right; the Lord said that they sought His presence daily. Their desires were right for they delighted to know God's path clearly. Their position was right for they followed God's pattern carefully. Their prayers were right, for they asked for God's purposes religiously. Their pleasures were right for they delighted in their pursuit of God personally (v.2).

But something was not right. They knew it, and God knew it. They were missing the sense of the smile of God upon them (v 3). They seemed correct in everything, but they were remiss in some significant areas of their lives. They were theologically correct, they were positionally right, but they were sadly remiss in the practical application of what they knew.

Outside the door of their complacency sat those bound in sin, burdened with sorrow, bereft in poverty, and begging for a loaf of bread. Some of them perhaps were their own children (vv 6-7).

Inside, they were discussing theological niceties that cost them absolutely nothing. They were proud of their "fasting," the things they "gave up for the Lord" (vv 3-4). Little wonder that the Lord called His servant to "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." Hopefully his call would penetrate their comfortable apathy before it was too late for the lost out there in the desperate dark.

That was not all that the Lord had to say. There were three things that had to go (v 9). They must remove the yoke of unlawful communion. The unequal yoke is painful to both partners and the only answer is not adjustment, but removal. The unequal yoke is not a matter of contact. We meet the world every day (so we need the basin every day!). It is a matter of contract, being bound by love, loyalty, or law to that which is alien to a life of fellowship with God. The marriage yoke, however, is fastened by a higher law, and God's intent was that death alone would break it.

They must withdraw the finger of unkind criticism. How easy to join in the assassination by tongue, of the character of some absent person – if not by serious allegation, then by nodding, silent assent. All our ecclesiastical accuracy, all our theological brilliance, all our golden eloquence, all our zealous activity is made a mockery, by a single finger pointed in the wrong direction, manward instead of Godward.

They must silence the tongue of unprofitable conversation. Vain words are "unemployed" words. They are idle, not accomplishing anything of value. Mouths rattling away with useless

palaver. They need not be dirty or evil, just nothing worthwhile. How many of us tremble a little at the thought of having to give account to the Lord Himself for every idle word? James is the one who can convict us about the tongue. "A fire," he says "a world of iniquity," defiling the body and starting up the wheels of lust whose axles are ignited by infernal heat (Jas 3:6).

If those people would, and if all of us will obey this urgent cry, then our souls will be fragrant, refreshingly, and fruitful as is a watered garden. They will be sweet, and satisfying to others, as sacrificial as an unfailing spring that ever gives out from hidden resources.

*"Lord, save us from cold forms of things that blind the heavenly view,  
And make our souls like bubbling springs and gardens wet with dew."*