Song of Solomon - Commentaries by William Reid

Song of Songs, Lecture 12: Doves' Eyes, and the Fair Beloved (1:15-16)

THE state of the heart out of which have come the fond and ardent expressions of her appreciation of her lover in the two verses immediately preceding, and which have been already considered, has doubled the expressive beauty of the bride's features; and the sight of this leads the delighted Bridegroom to express his enjoyment of it in the enraptured words, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes" (chap. 1:15).

The praise, "Thou hast doves' eyes," will be appreciated by every one who has marked the gentle expression, the soft, full, liquid beauty of the eye of the dove; and there is no power can give this beauty to the eyes and transfigure the countenance but the love of Christ realized and reciprocated. The Lord Himself said, "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." The bride had spoken of Him as a "bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of cypress," — "a bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me" — "a cluster of cypress is my Beloved to me;" and her endearing expression draws out the intensified expression of love to her, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes."1

It is one of the divine secrets of Christianity, that when we have been apprehended of Christ for "salvation with eternal glory," the eyes of our hearts being opened, and the truth of the purpose of God the Father in Christ being communicated to us, and we consciously realizing our spiritual relationship to the Father as "children of His love," in "the Son of His love," risen and glorified in His presence "in the heavenlies," the whole of Scripture becomes sensibly transfigured to us; and where we read before only narratives of human life, and tales of human love, we find now beneath the surface the true and hidden mysteries of the relationships, affection, and admiring reciprocal enjoyment of Christ and the Church. Just as a poet's eye can perceive beauties where the duller eye of the prosaic see only common objects of no particular interest; so our eyes, when opened on the Holy Scriptures in the light of an opened heaven and a glorified Christ, see beauties and glories where the unanointed eye sees only the record of the varied incidents and intercourse of everyday life.

"Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes."2 It is very observable, especially in the young, that the knowledge of Christ and intense enjoyment of His constraining love, and steady contemplation of His glorious person—especially if there be a considerable amount of intelligence in the Word—transfigure even the human countenance, and "newness of life" looks forth in entrancing loveliness from the gentle, soft, dove-like eyes, so that one who has seen much of the Lord's work could almost pick out the Christians by means of their looks, when Christ, in all His fullness, is being preached. There is a wonderful transforming power in beholding the glory of the Lord. It transfigures into the same image; and where the whole demeanor is not entirely metamorphosed by such a contemplation, it is a sure token that the person is either very ill taught in the Word of truth, or has never known the transforming power of "the grace of God," and of intimate, loving communion with the exalted Christ of glory.

There is such a word in Scripture as "the meekness and gentleness of CHRIST;" and He said, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;" and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; and the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all... in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves;" and Paul, exemplifying His teaching, says, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children;" and he writes to his own son Titus to enjoin upon the Christians that they be "gentle, showing all meekness unto all men."

The more thoroughly Christians are filled with Christ's fellowship and company, the more the gentle man or gentle woman will appear in their looks, words, and ways. But the "lofty eyes," the haughty mien, the imperial manner, and the habit of riding roughshod over, instead of condescending "to men of low estate," are sure indications of little spiritual fellowship with Christ, and little of that condition of soul that would draw from him the admiring expression of ardent endearment and sense of beauty, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes."

There is no means of getting entirely rid of one's old self and his ill-favored features, but by getting a new self in the person of Christ; for when He becomes the one circumstance, thought, desire, and object, self dies out of sheer neglect, and the beloved Bridegroom of the heart is in the foreground. He is manifestly put on; not professed merely—which is easy to do—but so possessed that He beams forth in the soft, liquid beauty—in the gentle looks of the dove-like eyes. If we speak too strongly of the outward metamorphosis, we are not aware of it; and if the generality of Christians are not so changed, so much the worse for the Christians; and we fear the apostle Paul would have added, "I speak this to your shame." Those who live according to the Christian ethics inculcated in such portions of the New Testament as Romans 12 and 1st Corinthians 13, and the second halves of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, will do so on account of supreme occupation with the person of Christ, and their whole deportment will exemplify "the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

Beloved, it is solemn work this Christian life of ours. We are making personal history for eternity! This is our only opportunity to be epistles of Christ to sinful men—lights in this world of darkness: are we able to say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"?

THE FAIR BELOVED AND THE GREEN COUCH.—We come now to consider the bride's words, "Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir" (chap. 1:16, 17).

1. BEHOLD, THOU ART FAIR, MY BELOVED, YEA, PLEASANT.— The bride returns the expression, "Thou art fair," conscious that He and not she was rather the one who should be so described: she also adds, "yea, pleasant." These two we find, in substance, in Psalm forty-fifth, where Christ is addressed, "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips." "Thou art beautified with beauty among the sons of men: Grace is poured upon Thy lips."

“Everything (says one) that is attractive, everything that is graceful in character and form, in feature and expression, is meant by grace. It is not what we usually call by that name: it is a term for what fits the person and draws the eyes of others to him. It is thus used (Prov. 4:9), ‘She shall give to thy head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee;’ — wisdom so clothing the person with moral beauty. It is thus, too, in Psalm 84:10, ‘The Lord will give grace and glory’ —the ornament of beauty, the crown of glory. All this, in full perfection, is found in Messiah’s person: all that is fitted to attract and fix the soul’s gaze: all that is beautiful in excellence: all that is drawing in holiness and majestic worth.”

Our Beloved is, indeed, fair beyond all human or angelic fairness, for He is the very impersonation of “the beauty of the Lord” — “the brightness of His glory and the express image of his person:” and, as the Word made flesh and dwelling amongst us, He was full of grace and truth; the form and reality of every moral excellence dwelt in Him, as well as all the fullness of the Godhead, and the Man Christ Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; and oh! how His fairness takes a poor believing sinner’s eye as he sees Him nailed to the cross for him, and radiant in His beauty and glory, as He pleads for him at the Father’s throne on high, arrayed in His priestly garments for glory and beauty. Says Augustine, “The bridegroom, to us believing, is everywhere beautiful. He is fair in heaven, fair on earth; fair in the Virgin’s womb; fair in the arms of His parents; fair in His miracles, fair in His stripes; fair when calling unto life, fair when disregarding death; fair in laying down His life, fair in receiving it again; fair in the cross, fair in the sepulcher.” But we would also add, fair in ascension, fair in His sitting on the Father’s throne crowned with glory and honor; fair in His preparing mansions for us in the Father’s house; fair in His coming again to receive us to Himself, that where He is there we may be also. “Lo! Thou art fair!”

And then, He is not only our fair beloved, but He is pleasant. Fair, “yes, charming!” is only the expression of her loving transport, and finds an illustrative commentary in the description (2:3-5).

“Fair Without being pleasant, the sons of men often are; pleasant also in measure they may be without being altogether fair; but JESUS is both, and in both He is perfect. Pleasantness implies a peculiar fitness to yield a resting-place for the soul, as distinguished from the excellence which excites mere admiration, or even from that which awakens love. It is found in the ‘good man, for whom peradventure some would even dare to die,’ but not in the ‘righteous man for whom they will scarcely die.’ The word is used to describe the sweet and solemn melodies of the sanctuary: ‘Sing praise to Him, because it is pleasant;’ the affectionate union of brethren, ‘Behold, how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;’ and the agreeableness of a chosen earthly friend, closer than a brother; ‘Very pleasant hast thou been to me, O Jonathan.’ Even such a delight, such a quiet rest and repose of soul does the redeemed church and the ransomed soul find in the kinsman Redeemer.”3 “Behold thou art fair my Beloved, yea pleasant.”

2. “OUR BED IS GREEN.” — “Yea, our couch is green:” the literal meaning is, “greeneth, grows; green,” a reference to the stately, verdant, and refreshing natural surroundings, in the midst of which, to their delight, their loving intercourse now takes place, and perhaps more particularly to a shady grass-plot under the trees of the park, upon which they were for the moment sitting or reclining. This figure requires some reference to Oriental customs and Eastern scenes in order to make it yield its illustration of very precious gospel truth. We shall allow a few to tell us what they know: — “Also our bed is green,” or the green flowery turf is our place of repose. The scene in which these words, and possibly all from verse 12, are used, seems to be laid in the kiosk or summerhouse in the royal garden. Oriental gardens were without the city, and from half-a-mile to a mile distant from the houses of the persons to whom they belonged. In the gardens around Aleppo commodious villas are built for the use of the inhabitants, to which they retire during the oppressive heats of summer. Here, amid the wild and almost impervious thickets of pomegranate and other fruit-bearing trees, the languid native and exhausted traveler find a delightful retreat from the scorching beams of the sun. A similar custom of retiring into the country, and taking shelter in the gardens at that season, appears to have been followed in Palestine in ages very remote. The exquisite pleasure which an Oriental feels while he reclines under the deep shade of the pomegranate, the apple, and other fruitful trees in the Syrian gardens, which, uniting their branches over his head, defend him from the glowing firmament, is well described by Russel: “Revived by the freshening breeze, the purling of the brooks, and the verdure of the groves, his ear will catch the melody of the nightingale, delightful beyond what is heard in England; with conscious gratitude to heaven, he will recline on the simple mat and bless the hospitable shelter.”

Lady Montague writes: “In the midst of the garden is the kiosk—that is, a large room, commonly beautified with a fine fountain in the midst of it. It is raised nine or ten steps, and enclosed with gilded lattices, round which vines, jessamines, and honeysuckles make a sort of green wall. Large trees are planted round this place, which is the scene of their greatest pleasures.”

Speaking of the plain of Sharon, a traveler remarks: “The fields were decked with thousands of gay flowers, forming an enameled carpet, that perfumed the air, and offered a scene replete with everything that could gratify the eye or charm the imagination.”

Wilkinson, vol. ii. p. 187, says: “The Egyptians spent much time in the cool and shady retirement of their gardens, when, like the Romans, they entertained their friends during the summer season, as we may judge from the size of some of the kiosks which occur in the paintings of the tombs.”

“How beautiful a retreat! For this plane tree is very wide-spreading and lofty, and the height and shadiness of this agnus castus are very beautiful, and, being now in full bloom, it makes the place exceeding fragrant. Moreover, there flows under this plane tree a delightful fountain of very cold water, to judge from its effect on the foot. Observe, again, the freshness of the spot how charming and delightful it is, and how summer-like and shrill it sounds from the choir of grasshoppers. But the most delightful of all is the grass, which, sloping gently, gives an easy support to the head as we recline.— (Plato’s Phœdrus, 5.)

“Our bed is green:” the place of our fellowship with our adorable Lord Jesus Christ is beyond the fading and the dying in the living beauty, freshness, and brightness of “the Paradise of God,” where the “Tree of Life” itself forever “grows green.” In the Canticles there is no question of sin raised; that has been conclusively settled for us by our self-sacrificing Bridegroom “long, long ago,” and believed by us to be so; and “the God of peace” has brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, and we are now sitting in His company in the heavenly places into which He is gone; and, now that He is risen from the dead and ascended up to the Father’s right hand, He is living in the ample glory of the paradise of God, and the verdure of glory flourishes eternally beneath His feet and ours, and the ever-during cedar spreads its living beams, and the fragrant cypress intertwines its branches, and forms the beautified roof of our house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

He is resting at noon in this pleasing, lovely place, the tabernacle which God hath pitched for Him and His ransomed Bride, “at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” He has gone to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God; and now we are sanctified by this truth of the Father and the Son—and what a freshness there is in our communion, what fragrance, what gorgeousness and loveliness envelop us! All is instinct with vitality, beauty, loveliness. It is no longer the confined place in the city of Salem, but the garden of God in all its grace, glory, and refreshing shade. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” No language can express how fair is our Beloved, no words convey any adequate conception of His sweetness; and to be with Him in a place so restful, and be there all alone enjoying the interchange of His loving looks, and mark how His pleasant countenance tells how delighted He is to have His affianced bride beside Him, where reciprocated love feeds the lips with the utterances of exquisite enjoyment and mutual admiration. All Scripture “grows green” under us when we are separated to God by being accepted in Christ risen and glorified, and it forms the resting-place of happy communion with our Heavenly Bridegroom, while the arched roof of His place of rest in glory is formed of the cedar of His “eternal redemption,” and carved by the intertwined cypress of life in resurrection, through which, in the Holy Ghost, we have a place of repose in this fragrant solitude of glory.

Even when the Lord Jesus comes again and gathers His lovely bride of earth—the Israel of God—and is with her here below, she will sit with Him in the power of redemption under the canopy of the cypress life, and all its blessings, which shall be hers when under the new covenant and partaking of all its blessings; for it is then “His rest shall be glorious.” “The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.” It will be the Father’s kingdom administered by the Son of His love and His risen bride, and enjoyed by His Israel in the grace and glory of risen life; and then shall “Israel blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6). It is with “Jesus the Resurrection and the Life,” the exalted glorious One, our souls have happy fellowship, and it will be enjoyed in all its fullness in heavenly glory when we shall be with Him and like Him; and then, too, shall Israel be placed in connection with Him as the medium of living blessing in millennial glory to all the nations of the earth (Psalms 67-77.)

Such a theme is inexhaustible. We have many things yet to say on it, but time and space warn us to defer until another opportunity. Recommending our beloved readers to cultivate this living, glorious fellowship, with the loving Bridegroom of our hearts in the heavenly glory, we say for the present, Farewell. “Alone with Jesus:” How full of bliss and glory!

Song of Songs, Lecture 11: The Camphire Cluster in the Vineyards (1:14)

WE have already written of the spikenard at the table and the myrrh in the bosom, and now we come to the camphire in the vineyards. These three may represent to us corporate fellowship, private communion, and public testimony.

“CAMPHIRE” occurs twice in the Song of Solomon (1:14; 4:13), and evidently denotes not what we know in our day as camphor, but some fragrant plant. The word in the Hebrew translated camphire is the same as the cypress of the Greeks, and denotes the well-known henna of the East.

One writes of it thus: “The henna of the Arabs is a species of privet (Lawsonia inermis). Throughout the summer, in the gardens of Egypt and Palestine, it yields its delicate little clusters of blossom, lilac-colored. On account of their exquisite perfume they are highly prized, and one of the street cries of Cairo is, ‘O odors of Paradise! O flowers of the henna!’ These flowers grow in light open tufts, and are compared by Mariti to ‘an upturned cluster of grapes;’ and when we remember that they are still worn in their bosom by the ladies of the East, nothing can be more descriptive of a heartfelt affection than the language of the Canticle—

Another writes— “Camphire here is the cypress flower or Alhenna, which is indigenous to India, and probably to Egypt, and may have been transplanted by Solomon in his vineyards at Engedi for the sake of the peculiarly strong odor of its yellowish-white grape-like clusters of flowers.” Compare in respect to the fondness of Oriental women for this aromatic plant the testimony of a recent traveler: “The white Henna-blossoms, which grow in clusters, and are called Tamar-henna, have a very penetrating odor, which seems disagreeable to the European who is unaccustomed to it; but the Orientals have an uncommon liking for this odor, and prefer it to any other. The native women commonly wear a bouquet of Tamar-henna on their bosom.”2

Another writes “This beautiful odoriferous plant, if it is not annually cut, and kept low, as it is usually in other places, grows ten or twelve feet high, putting out its little flowers in clusters, which yield a most grateful smell, like camphor, and may therefore be alluded to Cant. 1:14, where it is said— ‘My beloved is to me as a cluster of cypress (or al-hennah) in the vineyards (or gardens) of Engedi.’ The leaves of this plant, after they are dried and powdered, are disposed of to good advantage in all the markets of this kingdom. For with this all the African ladies that can purchase it tinge their lips, hair, hands, and feet, rendering them thereby of a tawny, saffron color, which with them is reckoned a great beauty.”3

The word translated “Camphire” is rendered “pitch” in Gen. 6:14; “a ransom,” Exod. 30:12; “satisfaction,” Num. 35:31, 32; and “a bribe,” Amos 5:12. In each case the leading idea is to hide or cover. In the first passage the pitch is said to have been put on the gopher wood of the ark; in the second and third a sinful state is kept out of view, by a kind of atonement being made; and in the fourth the magistrate turning away from the mind of God, accepts a bribe that he may conceal the truth, and thus lead to a false judgment. Here, and in chapter 4:13, the same idea lurks in the word. The plant thus named yielded a substance which was used to cover certain parts of the body. The females in the East use it still as a dye for the palms of their hands, their fingernails, and their lips and teeth.4

Dr. Kitto says— “The camphire is now generally agreed to be the henna of the Arabians. The deep color of the bark, the light green of the foliage, and the softened mixture of white-yellow in the blossoms, present a combination as agreeable to the eye as the odor is to the scent. The flowers grow in dense clusters, the grateful fragrance of which is as much appreciated now as in the time of Solomon. The women take great pleasure in these clusters, hold them in their hand, carry them in their bosom, and keep them in their apartments to perfume the air.”

Enough has now been said about the plant to give us a comprehensive grasp of the illustration, and enable us to see the force of the simile when it is said, “My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.”5

The cluster of camphire is spoken of as in the vineyards, and the Beloved is compared to it as it grows in its native habitat—in a place of great natural loveliness, fertility, and beauty. To us the figure points away from earth to “the paradise of God,” where our Beloved, the risen and ascended Lord Jesus, displays His living beauty, and diffuses the pleasing and peculiar fragrance of all the graces of His character as the glorified One. No doubt the natural illustration tells of the women taking great pleasure in these clusters—as cut flowers—holding them in their hand, carrying them in their hair and in their bosoms, and having them in their rooms to scent the air with their fragrance: nevertheless, we must think of the simile as placing us in the midst of the most fertile garden, and inviting us to satiate our eyes with looking on the beautiful living clusters of the cypress flowers as they bloom on their native soil, and feast our sense of smell with the aromatic perfume they emit as they fill the summer air with the “savor of life;” which, though unpleasant to a stranger, is very agreeable to the people who are born where they spread their fragrance.

Oh, the attractiveness of a risen, living, glorified Christ! It is something indescribable, when one’s eyes are opened, to see not only the value of the death of Christ; but, being transported in spirit to heaven itself, to “see JESUS,” who is filling all the air of the paradise of God with the living fragrance of His adorable glorified person, after He has glorified the Father on the earth, died for our sins, and risen again into a sphere which will never witness the bleeding myrrh, but be perfumed by the peculiar aroma of the ever-blooming camphire, while a happy eternity rolls on its timeless, glorious years.

Ah, beloved, is not this the great defect of our public testimony that we are not entering into the holiest—that we are not living in the spiritual realization of the preciousness, attractiveness, and agreeableness of the risen, exalted, glorified Christ? In order to give a full-orbed testimony we must be in fellowship with Him as He sits at His table; He must be to us as the myrrh in our bosom in the preciousness of His love, His blood and death; but our spirits must also know Him, and the power of His resurrection. We must gaze on His living beauty, and smell the perfume of His resurrection-life now that He is seen in risen and exalted glory in His celestial home.

It is this leaving the bustle and din of the crowded city for the seclusion of the far-off garden—this entering into the grand and glorious truth that the Christ who gave Himself for us is now in the fragrant bloom of life for evermore, that we feel a holy separation to Him who is now gone into heaven, and such satisfaction and delight in Him, our ever-living High Priest, that we are not only filled and pervaded by a sweet sense of His loveliness, but we feel it to be our delight to be “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

In proportion, then, as death works in us, and the earthen vessels containing the treasure of a heavenly Christ are broken, so life is communicated by means of our testimony, though directly by the grace of the Holy Ghost. Our testimony in the Church will be with refreshing and edifying power, in the measure that we ourselves are enjoying a dead, risen, and glorified Christ. All Church witness is produced by the Holy Ghost in connection with a glorified Christ, for “beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” The Holy Ghost is writing “the epistle of Christ,” with nothing other than the pen of glory. And just as no man was able to stand before Joshua and the Israelites after they had crossed the Jordan, encamped in Gilgal around the stones commemorative of death and resurrection, were circumcised, kept the passover, and ate the old corn of the land; and had seen the armed Man—the Captain of the Lord’s host—and stood before Him with the unshod foot: so neither will men be able to stand before even the most despicable ram’s-horn testimony of those who are consciously associated with a risen Christ, and are captivated by His attractiveness, and perfumed with his ever-living fragrance as the heavenly one.

When our souls are feasting on Him, as they drink in the living sweetness of His life in glory, and we have the fragrant bloom of life in Him permeating our spirits; when we have Him in our bosoms nearest our hearts; when a risen Christ is carried openly in our hands, as the Orientals carry the cluster of cypress blooms, with all the sweet-smelling savor of “life and immortality;” when our every sense receives the fresh “savor” of our glorified Lord; and when every power of the mind, sensibility of the soul, affection of the heart, and action of the life, declares plainly that our eyes are in the paradise of God, and our whole life here below is one prolonged, ecstatic utterance— “The Lord has risen” — “We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor”— “My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the gardens of Engedi:” then shall our testimony to the Christ of God be “in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;” and the simplest word of precious gospel truth will serve to lay down sinners in the dust before the exalted One, as suddenly as the walls of Jericho fell down flat before the Captain of the Lord’s host, when His people had compassed it seven days, blowing with trumpets of rams’ horns, and raising the united and God-appointed battle shout.

It has greatly interested me, in a spiritual sense, to observe the united testimony of travelers to the excessive fondness of the eastern women for the camphire flowers. O beloved, if we had more of the woman in our Christianity, we should soon be made to wonder and give thanks at the success of our life and labors. We hear much of an intelligent, a manly, a self-sacrificing, and even a muscular Christianity; and if there be true conversion—the “new creation” —we find no fault; but surely if there is to be a manly Christianity there should also be a womanly; for the Lord God has said, “It is not good that the man should be alone;” and an apostle wrote, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”

The risen and glorified Lord Jesus, who, when on earth, bore our sins, who died our death, and glorified God in regard to sin, has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father; and the Holy Ghost has come down from the Father to unfold the glories and attractions of His exalted Son, as well as to present His blood and death as meeting our need; and He not only satisfies our minds and relieves our consciences by His unfolding’s of Christ, but He presents “Jesus Himself” in all the fragrance of His spotless life on earth, His atoning death, present intercession, and coming glory, as the one object to engage and feast the renewed affections of our new nature, and fill our spirits with a sweet sense of His constraining love.

No fondness of the Oriental women for the al-henna clusters should equal our womanly affection for our precious and exalted Lord. For what purpose is it again and again recorded that woman was found in deepest attachment to the Saviour’s person when on earth, but to show us that as the Bride of the Lamb we are to be filled with an ardent affection to our glorious Head and Lord?

Whatever men may think or say, the weakness and little success of the ransomed bride of Christ is chiefly owing to the all but universal exclusion of the womanly from our modern Christianity. O beloved, why do we not take our place with that Christ-loving woman sinner to whom Jesus said, “Thy sins are forgiven—thy faith hath saved thee?” and of whom we read that she “brought an alabaster box of ointment and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with ointment;”—or with that Mary “who stood at the sepulcher weeping,” and lingered there weeping on with a heart full of affection for her absent Lord, even after the ardent Peter and the loving John had gone away to their own home: for her heart could find no home for itself until the lips of the Incarnate Love said “Mary,” and filled her spirit with the fragrance of His love and the attractive power of His risen life.

Christian knowledge is of great importance; labor for Christ is a blessed privilege which we should diligently improve; a life of holiness should be assiduously cultivated; but the heart and soul of all these must be an all-absorbing love to our risen Christ Himself. If we were enjoying the glorified Christ, our cup of joy would overflow, and saints and sinners would be benefited. We often say to sinners that feelings are of no use to obtain pardon of their sins; but having faith there must be feeling and love, for love is the very nature of God and the source of Christianity.

As we stand on the verge of year after year, and look back over the years that have passed away, who have not cause to deplore how sadly Christless they have been, when they ought to have had each day’s waking hours filled with thoughts of Him, love to Him, labor for Him? nay, more, our hearts should have been burning with such a boundless, exhaustless flame of love to Him, that our very dreams in the night season should have been dreams of our Beloved.

O how blessed to have our eyes and hearts filled with Him, as we may still have to tread, for a “little while,” the desert way, fight the good fight of faith, or labor to gather in lost ones to His flock. He is coming to take us, His ransomed bride, into the Father’s house, to present us there in Himself our righteousness, spotless and stainless; and then shall the marriage supper of the Lamb be enjoyed. A well-known poet sings of the glory of the place in such words as these:

But what will be all the glory of our circumstances, compared with the unutterable blessedness of being with our Lord and Saviour Himself in His own glorious Home? He is now “our hope;” and hopeless indeed and dark were our present desert journey, did we not entertain good hope, through grace, of being with Christ, which is far better. But even now, blessed be God, “we see Jesus,” and soon “shall we ever be with the Lord;” and every Christ-loving heart can now go on its way rejoicing, singing such a song of deliverance as this, for “hope maketh not ashamed” :

Song of Songs, Lecture 10: The Myrrh Bundle in the Bosom (1:13)

“A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me,

That lodges between my breasts.”

Song of Sol. 1:13.

THE figure here employed is expressive of the spiritual agreeableness and pleasantness to the hearts of His people of intimate and holy spiritual communion with Jesus. He is compared to an amulet, or a box filled with liquid myrrh-gum borne continually in the bosom.

One has written— “The Eastern women, among other ornaments, used little perfume boxes, or vessels filled with perfume to smell at. These were worn suspended from the neck, and hanging down on the breast. Such smelling-boxes are still in use among the Persian women, to whose necklaces, which fall below the bosom, is fastened a large box of perfumes. Some of these boxes are as large as one’s hand; the common ones are of gold, the others are covered with jewels. They are all bored through, and filled with a black paste, very light, made of musk and amber, but of very strong smell.” Another says— “Myrrh was one of the most costly and fragrant perfumes. The shrub is beautiful, with smooth leaves of a dark green on the upper, and a whitish color on the under surface, with flowers of a reddish-purple, and a remarkable odor in the root, branches, leaf, and bloom, so that a cluster gathered therefrom was beautiful and fragrant. Yet the liquid obtained by exudation gave the tree its chief value, and is most probably what is here mentioned. Nothing of the kind could be more delightful to the senses than myrrh thus worn in the bosom.”

The spiritual mind of the Christ-loving one is of “quick understanding” to discern the meaning of such a word as “a bundle of myrrh is my well-Beloved unto me.” Myrrh was a chief spice in the anointing oil of God’s sanctuary; so is the Beloved of most excellent fragrance to the believing soul: “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee.” And the word is “a bundle of myrrh!” How great the treasure one has in having Jesus, for in Him “it pleaseth all the fullness to dwell” (Col. 1:19). He is “full of grace and truth.” And how intense the loving apprehension of His pleasantness to the soul! “My Beloved to me.”

It is like the language of the loving Mary at “the grave of Jesus,” who speaks as though she were entitled to claim Him and take Him entirely to herself. “Tell me,” said she as to the gardener, “where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” He was all her own. What precious affection! What a sense of our title to Him! How should it be thus with each one of us; each of us knowing our own personal individual claim and right to a whole Christ in all His fullness—our title to Himself!

There is surely a great lack of spiritual appreciation of Christ in all His excellencies when we hear those who take the place of Christians, speaking, praying, and praising, as if they were in the outer court of the Gentiles, smiting on the breast and standing “afar off;” instead of now “having boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus,” as fully-purged worshippers, who have seen the divine love go through all the functions and services necessary to its day of consecration (1 John 4:17). How far from the experience of the preciousness and pleasantness of fellowship with a known and intensely-loved Saviour are those who are deprecating wrath, imploring mercy, as if they had

never known anything of the God-glorifying and sin-atoning sacrifice of the cross; who think it Christian humility to groan in legal bondage, continually bemoaning their defeat in the contest with their corruptions; and who have not got beyond beseeching God to give them an interest in Christ, adopt them into His family, and prevent them from going down to the pit. Nothing is more common than for Christian men unchristianly to finish off their public prayers in this way: “Remove our guiltiness and save us; pardon our sins and accept us in the Beloved; for all we ask is for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.” There is no Beloved like a “bundle of myrrh” in the bosom, when such language is on the lips; but there is Jewish distance, doubt, fear, and uncertainty. We may often hear such suppliants take their position before God as creatures, and unhesitatingly acknowledge Him with “much assurance” as their Creator and Preserver; but they lose their “assurance” instantly they refer to Him as the God of salvation; and their speech runs in this way: “We thank Thee if thou hast redeemed us by the ‘precious blood of Christ;’ if Thou hast opened our eyes, and shown us our sinful condition; if Thou hast given us Thy Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts; and if Thou hast given us good hope through grace of getting our souls saved, of being united to Christ, and gaining the prize of eternal life in heaven.”

“My brethren, these things ought not so to be:” for God has so loved us as to give His Son to redeem us: Christ also hath loved us and died for us: redemption has been accomplished through His death: the righteous demands of God have been satisfied, the veil is rent, heaven opened: Christ is risen: God has been glorified about sin: remission of sins is now preached to the guilty, and justification from all things through a dead and risen Christ to every believer in His name; and we are invited, in virtue of Christ’s one sacrifice, once offered, to draw near to God “in full assurance of faith” and worship in the holiest of all, as those whose consciences are purged by the blood of Christ, and of whom the Holy Ghost testifies, “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” The work of redemption is as complete as the work of creation, for “His work is perfect.” And the work of new creation in Christ Jesus is as real as the work of the old creation; and there need be as little uncertainty whether we belong to the new creation as about our connection with the old creation. If we are alive to men, we are in the old creation; if we are “alive to God,” we are in the new. And there is no more difficulty about knowing whether we are by grace the risen children of God than that we were by nature “children of wrath.” But there must be the realization of Christian position in order to the enjoyment of Christian experience. Sorrowful it is to say, that those who profess to be believers are occupied rather in seeking to get Christ as a Saviour than in enjoying Him as a Friend. This is wholly unscriptural. There is no instance of any believer whose conversion or Christian course is detailed in the New Testament after the descent of the Holy Ghost doubting whether he were a believer or not. The woeful spectacle of Christian professors being generally unestablished was reserved for a later era; for, so far as we have the record of Christian experience in the Apostolic Church, doubters were unknown. How sad it is that in our day the great majority of those who profess faith in Christ could not say, “He loved me and gave Himself for me;” and hence they can, know nothing of the holy and unselfish experience of the bride when she says, “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me, that lodges between my breasts.”

God has given us a finished salvation in Christ Jesus to begin with; “for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves—it is the gift of God;” and all that we might be set before His Presence in love in the holiest, without any fear as to our state, and have nothing to do to get ourselves into His favor, but only delight His heart by enjoying His beloved Son. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father” when we delight in Christ as our Beloved. “For the Father loveth the Son.”

It is interesting to remember that myrrh was among the gifts presented to Christ by the wise men at His birth; and myrrh was employed by Nicodemus for embalming “the body of Jesus at His death;” and in the ivory palaces where He has been anointed with the oil of gladness His garments smell of myrrh: and whether we think of Him as the “Word made flesh,” or as laying down His life for us, or as within the veil as our anointed High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, which is that of power and blessing, we can say individually, “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me.”

This is individual, personal communion. “We have an altar” whereof we have a God-conferred right to eat “who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;” and this altar is one of peace offerings, for these were the sacrifices of which the offerer ate; and after all the imperfect sacrifices have been set aside, we are left with “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” His work haying been finished, we are now invited to gaze on Him, the great Purger of sins, seated at the right hand of the throne of God, the Maker, Upholder, and Heir of all things, crowned with glory and honor, His person the same, His work, His priesthood, His kingdom the same forever. Perfection is stamped on everything He has touched; and, among other things, His blood perfects the sinner’s conscience, and leaves us free to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus,” and enjoy Himself now that He is enthroned in the calm peace of the heavenly sanctuary.

When we think of the glory of His person as the Son of God, the efficacy of His one sacrifice to put away sin, and perfect forever us who are sanctified by His blood, His grace as the minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle in heaven, His dignity as the ascended Man crowned with glory and honor, and of His coming in due time to take us to be with Himself, and then come forth with us in heavenly majesty to enter along with us, His blood-bought associates, on the enjoyment of His “kingdom that cannot be moved;” and when we reflect that each of us may take up the apostolic strain, and say, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me,” we will see cause for loving Him with our whole hearts, and saying individually, “A bundle of myrrh is my well-Beloved unto me: He shall lie all night between my breasts.”

“The night is far spent; the day is at hand:” but however long or short, Jesus himself shall lodge “all night” in my bosom. “I in them,” is His own word; “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” is the spirit-breathed prayer of the holy apostle. He had prayed to the GOD of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the first chapter of Ephesians, that the eyes of their understanding might be opened; that they might know their standing, and the glory awaiting them in association with their heavenly and glorified Head: and in chapter 3 he bows his knees to the FATHER, whose deep eternal love underlies all Christian standing privileges and glory. The apostle prays “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height:” of what? He does not say. Most readers will say it is “love;” but that does not seem likely, for the next limb of the sentence adds, as an additional thing— “And to know the Love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” The whole of the preceding part of chapter 3 is about “the mystery of the Christ,” which contains the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” They might have searched for it in vain in the Holy Scriptures, for “by revelation He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,” “being the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God,” but is “now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by His Spirit.” And now, seeing it was given only by Paul, He says, “When ye read” my “few words, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of the Christ;” and when he bows his “knees unto the Father,” he prays for the strengthening of the

inner man by His Spirit, that the Christ of this newly-revealed mystery—the glorious Man, who was raised from the dead and set on high as Head of the Church, His body—may dwell in their hearts by faith; for it is only as faith accepts this new revelation by the apostle, and the Christ dwells in the heart according to the latest communication, that, “being rooted and grounded in love, we will be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height” of the mighty display of the scheme of the God of grace and Father of Glory, according to His purpose and grace and counseled wisdom for the manifestation of His glory in the Church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end, “and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.” What a name is His!— “a name that is above every name;”—and we are gathered to that name of life, love, grace, power, and glory; and He is “made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” In the night period of deep trial, when the apostle was moving about in the service of the gospel, he was constantly cherishing a sense of the presence of Christ with him, and he spread abroad the savor of his own enjoyment of Him in every company and in every place. When he enumerates his trials in 2 Cor. 11, he ends them by recounting the undignified circumstances in which he began his ministry: “Through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall and escaped.” That is the very bathos of humiliation for him as a man; but from being let down in a basket he can come immediately to visions and revelations of the Lord, and glory in “a man in Christ,” being caught up into paradise; and again, on coming back, have a thorn in the flesh which the Lord will not remove, but give him his present power to bear; and immediately that he hears Him say, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” he says, “Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” One who knew Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, as did Paul, could say in truth, “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me.”

And just as a bag of myrrh, carried in the bosom, scents the garments, and the person diffuses the odor wherever he goes, so do those who have a passionate and intelligent affection for Christ cast around them, unconsciously, the sweet savor of their fellowship in love with Him. A person redolent of odoriferous perfumes does not need to sound a trumpet before him, and announce the fact, so neither do those who are enjoying Christ, for they cannot move without giving proof, though all unconsciously (Moses wist not that his face shone), that they carry Him continually in their bosom, and enjoy the sweet perfume of all the graces of His person as the Man of Sorrows or the Man of glory. “Christ is all” to them as their object, and He is “in all” as their life. For real spiritual enjoyment of Him we must get clean out of “the flesh” by death to it in virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ, and be united to Jesus, risen, ascended, and glorified, sins all forgiven us for His name’s sake, and we consciously set free by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus on resurrection ground, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, before we can truly say, “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me.” It is not love first, but faith that takes hold of the revelation of God. The eyes must be opened, and faith must receive Christ, “according to the riches of His glory,” before we come to the prayer to know the love of Christ. God’s order in Ephesians is Christ and all blessings in Him, the heart occupied with Him, and then the life devoted to Him, “according to the power that worketh in us.”

When we see intelligently and by the Holy Ghost that Christ has died for our sins, and they can no more condemn us, and we have died to sin in Him, and it shall not any longer have dominion over us; that He was delivered up for our offenses, and raised up for our justification; that we are now associated with Him in life, blessing, and glory, and that His love will not be satisfied until its service reach its utmost bound, when He not only presents us faultless before the presence of His glory, but seats us at the glorious banquet of love in the Father’s house, and Himself comes forth and serves us. No expression is too strong to convey our sense of the joy and delight He is to our souls, “for the love of Christ constraineth us;” “we love Him because He first loved us.” “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me; He shall lodge continually in my heart.”

Song of Songs, Lecture 9: The Spikenard at His Table (1:12)

THE Bride has been brought into the chambers —she has gone out to the royal encampment —she has been adorned with beauteous ornaments beseeming her princely rank, and now she appears at the banquet, where the King is sitting in the circle of His guests. “While the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth, forth the smell thereof” (Song of Solomon, 1:12).

The King’s table represents public fellowship, as the King’s chamber represents private communion. When Jesus was born King of the Jews, the wise men came and presented Him with their treasures; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When Christ was sitting at His table in the upper room, where He instituted the remembrance feast with His disciples, there was no doubt blissful enjoyment and the drawing forth of the fragrance of the grace which He had imparted, but it was chiefly after He had sat down at His table above, anointed with the oil of gladness, and had shed down the Holy Ghost on His disciples, that they had the fragrance of the graces imparted by the Holy Ghost drawn forth in communion with Himself at His banquet of heavenly love. The thought which this subject suggests is this, that when Christ himself is filling our hearts and feasting our souls on Himself, so that He absorbs our attention and engages our affections, our graces are all in movement, and we have such a supply of “the spirit of Jesus Christ,” that the odor of the ointment fills the house, so that men can take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.

There are many illustrations of this in the Holy Scriptures. Abraham had such a sight of Christ’s day, and so lived at His table by faith, that he could allow Lot to choose the well-watered plains of Jordan; Moses could renounce the pleasures of sin for the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, and leave Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; David could live the life of an exile and spare Saul, even when he was in his power, because he could sing, “The Lord is my shepherd—Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over;” Peter was with Him at the table when he said, “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee;” and the spikenard of the disciples filled all Jerusalem with its fragrance when the Spirit descended on them at Pentecost, and they were so manifestly enjoying communion with the exalted Lord of glory, that the Jewish Sanhedrim were so much offended at the fragrance that it is said they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus; while the proto-martyr Stephen, praying for his murderers, let forth a fragrance that told unmistakably of intimate communion with his exalted Lord who had prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;” and Paul, in his life of self-sacrifice and devoted service, let out the spikenard fragrance when he said, “The love of Christ constraineth us: for me to live is Christ.” The King sitting at His table so occupied his thoughts and affections, that he was a sweet savor of Christ in all his ways wherever he went, pleasing not himself but pleasing all men for

their good unto edification, and aiming that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. As a natural man he was no doubt self-asserting, proud, ambitious, and looking to outstrip all his compeers; but by the Spirit of Christ he was quickened; new life in association with the risen and glorified Christ was imparted, and the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” shed around him its spikenard fragrance. He could be the last and the least in the lowly path of service, enjoining forbearance with the weak, and avoiding all cause of offense even against the scruples of a factitious conscience, while he would love the saints the more the less he was loved. In preaching and teaching; in suffering and in service; in his missionary zeal for souls; and his care of all the churches, as well as in worship or letter writing from his Roman prisons, he was ever in heart-absorbing fellowship with the King at His table. Because his communion Christ-ward was a continual feast, he could let the spikenard of a continual fast manward tell how entirely he was occupied with Christ. He might say truly, “Out of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace.”

This spikenard, then, sending forth its odors when the King sitteth at His table, represents to us how the graces of the Spirit will flow forth from the saints when they are consciously in the repose of faith enjoying Christ Himself.1

All true service, as all true worship, must be the overflow of the heart which is feasting with the Lord in happy communion, while He sits at His own table. What a table is His! What has He not done to provide us with the rarest, richest, and costliest fare! “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” All sorts of choice things, and in the greatest abundance, are there. He himself is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;—all according to the riches of His glory—all our need supplied according to His riches in glory; and there we have the best company; for “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ:” and “all saints.” Christ being our all—our joy is full.

“The King” is always “at His table:” but sad it is that we are not always consciously with Him there. We should have all the fragrance of profound humility, were we always in His presence at the feast He makes. We are never taken up with ourselves when in the presence of those infinitely superior to ourselves—but we take our proper place of admiration and think of them. So is it with the saints of God when in happy fellowship with Christ. And when Mary of Bethany broke the alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and poured it on Jesus, the act so pleased Him that while the house was filled with the odor of the ointment, the act is so fragrant to Christ that He has secured that the perfume shall be felt in His house to the latest ages. “She hath done what she could,” said Jesus, and added, “Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of, for a memorial of her.” We err if we think we have nothing to present to our Lord. Having the new life—the Holy Ghost—Christ in you—a heart fitted by His grace to appreciate the preciousness of Christ, by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit our hearts may be made to overflow, and in fullness of joy we may, like the Israelite presenting his basket of first-fruits, worship at the altar, offering by Christ the sacrifice of praise to God continually, and “do good and communicate,” knowing that “with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” We have received how we ought to walk and to please God (1 Thess. 4:1); and the kindness of the saints in sending once and again their gifts to Paul was “an odor of a sweet smell; a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Philip. 4:18).2

One writes beautifully on this point: “The heart never rises to the point of worship until it runs over. Then it has nothing to ask for. True worship is the overflowing of the heart. And oh! how sweet, how precious, how blessed it is! When the Holy Ghost ministers of the fullness of Jesus to our souls, how soon the heart runs over. And this overflowing of the heart with the fullness of Christ is true heavenly worship. To be in the presence-chamber of the Lord—the holiest of all—and to be feasting on the rich provisions of His table; what can we be but satisfied? What can we do but praise, admire, adore, love, and worship? The bride has now reached the highest place of blessedness. She is peacefully enjoying the presence of the King, while He is reclining at His table. The activities of service have given place to the repose of worship. The burning sun, the persecution, the poverty, the sorrow, are all forgotten in the fullness of that joy which His presence gives. And now the box is broken, the spikenard flows, the fragrance fills the house, the head and the feet of Jesus are anointed, and the heart is ravished with the advances of her love.”3

We are introduced to Christ as at His table, when we see Him incarnate with His disciples as at that supper which he desired to eat with them before He suffered, and when He said, “I appoint unto you a kingdom as My Father hath appointed Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” When we sit with Him at the feast of love which he makes for us in His house, enjoying communion with Himself and with His saints, as at His own table on the glorious resurrection day,—what a feast is it to be led by the Holy Ghost into the, knowledge of Himself in His original glory as the Divine Son, His moral glory as the Revealer of the Father’s name, and Redeemer of men, the Man full of grace and truth, in whom God delighted, when made flesh and dwelling amongst us; in His present glory, as crowned with glory and honor, and seated as Head of His body, and we united with Him there as glorified, and having the Holy Ghost in His measureless fullness baptizing us all into the great vessel of power and love, grace and glory—His body; which shall be displayed with Him when He comes in His glory to enter upon the inheritance of all things, as the heaven-appointed Heir, Head, and Lord; and to know that ere long the heavenly courts shall reecho the voice from the throne, “as the voice of many waters” — “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. Blessed are they that are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb.” What a feast it is to look onward to being the Lamb’s wife, and being surrounded by those called ones and all the holy hosts of heaven (Rev. 5.): and being with Christ as the golden city of which He will be the light and glory, when from it, as His center, He will administer the kingdom in the world to come, and be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe. No wonder that Paul had great conflict for the saints, that their hearts might be knit together in love to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, for it is only when the saints are kept up to the highest point of their blessing in Christ, according to the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that they are safe from the seducings of Satan, and the enticings and beguilings of men; and having communion with Christ, according to the fullest revelation, are enabled to give forth the precious spikenard savor, according to the Holy Spirit’s composition, which contains all the ingredients of the latest revelation, “as the truth is in Jesus, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of God.”

The apostle Paul wrote, “Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ; and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ.” But can Christians be “a sweet savor of Christ,” if they do not know “the Christ of God”? Can they give off the true aroma of Christ unless they know “the mystery of the Christ,” as Paul revealed it? What is the condition of the majority of saints? Are there not many groaning in bondage because they have not yet obtained deliverance through Christ? (Rom. 7.)

And even among those who are delivered, do not the majority occupy themselves with themselves? and is not the aroma they give chiefly that which savors of personal advantage, rather than of the heart filled with Christ? They have had a happy escape from the flaming sword of justice—they have been so happy since they believed in Christ; they have had such enjoyment in serving the Lord, and trying to get sinners saved: and they don't waste their time inquiring into mysteries—the Church may be composed of all saints, from Abel on to the great white throne, or only of the baptized election of the present parenthesis—the great thing is to make sure of being of it—lead a good and holy life, and get sinners saved, and as for dispensational truth, Church truth, kingdom glories, and the Lord's coming, whether it be pre-millennial or post-millennial, they will not trouble themselves; they will leave all these mysteries in the Lord's hands, and they will give themselves to gospel work and presentation of that truth which will not make any disturbance among Christians, only being up to the standard measure of a broken-down Christendom; and thus they will ensure tranquility and peace, ease and comfort to themselves, and thus be able to make "a fair show in the flesh" of having a great amount of work, even though it should turn out to be mostly "wood, hay, and stubble," when "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Beloved saints are not aware how all this smells offensively of self, and that it is not faith "that will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The Christianity of the multitude is the heresy of Hymenæus and Philetus in its full-grown manifestation: "Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some." If the resurrection were past as to our witness on earth with our being "risen with Christ" as to our souls, then we need no longer stand, walk, work, and witness by faith, and set our affection on things above, and acknowledge the mystery of a called-out and heavenly body baptized into living association with a rejected Christ, as far as earth is concerned, and a glorified Christ, who has been claimed and seated by the Father in the heavenly glory.

Those who do not enter into the great truths connected with "the mystery of Christ," as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, cannot keep altogether free of the heresy of Hymenæus and Philetus; and instead of being entirely on the principle of faith, be of faith and sight, by turns, as the spoilings of philosophy, or the beguilings of superstition, may have place given them. "As ye therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught:" and what a different savor the Spikenard will give "while the King sitteth at His table," compared with the savor when self is sitting at its table, and cutting and carving according to the best of its ability and wisdom. The true Christian spikenard is that which is composed according to the directions of the sanctuary, and which diffuses the savor of Christ according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but which hath now been made manifest to the saints; Christ in you by the Holy Ghost on earth, you in Christ in heaven; you associated with Him as members of His body, as He is set down in the glory of God above; and He with you and in you in the power and grace of the Holy Ghost dwelling in His body the church below, making it a heavenly vessel of grace and power as it is connected with the Head in glory, and constituting it an answer to the place God has given Him at His right hand. Oh how little the servants of God have Paul's agony for the saints, that they might have "all riches of the full assurance of understanding to the full knowledge of the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." How sad that even ministers of Christ now-a-days, instead of saying "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ;" they now say, Beware lest any man communicate to you "the mystery of God!" How it throws the true servant who is in concert with the purpose of God into an agony for the saints, when they are not rising to the height of the position He gives them in Christ and by the Holy Ghost, and are not entering into the full knowledge of "the great mystery Christ and the Church," for he knows that that is God's means for giving them communion with His mind and heart in Christ, and preserving them from the evil currents of the age. And if we do not know it, it must be because of our misreading of "the word of Christ;" for it is fully revealed.

As another has well said, "In the present day there is very little apprehension of what the mystery of God is, and every allusion to the subject, or attempt to unfold it, is generally met by the repulse, 'It is too high,' showing at once that there is no true idea of the nature of the benefits which it confers, or of that true devotedness to Christ, which even in the youngest will never think anything too high which offers greater nearness to and association with Him. For such an one, even like John's two disciples (John 1: 35-37), will naturally, as I may say, because simply devoted, have taste for the highest point. Though strangers, they say to Christ, 'Where dwellest thou?' They instinctively seek the place where He could be best known in the greatest intimacy; their hearts leaped onward to the point which only could satisfy them. Oh! for the true servant, the true energy, that the saints might be awakened to the counsel of God, and thus that there should be an acceptable offering for Christ out of that which is ripening for judgment! In conclusion, let me remark that the subject for prayer which the apostle specially commends to the saints, both in Ephesians and Colossians, is this mystery. The Lord give us all to see how responsible we are for maintaining the truth; how unsafe is our position otherwise, but in it how perfectly preserved we should be from the dire currents which are breaking in on every religious association, decoying souls into formalism or rationalism, and all bemuse they do not bold to the spot where they would be perfectly according to God's mind, and perfectly safe and happy."

How well the servant who was used as the revealer of the Christ of God in connection with the mystery answered in his character, life, and experience to the peculiar truths he communicated. How thoroughly he had been saturated in the mystery of Christ, and how fully his spikenard gave forth the smell thereof. He was molded by what he preached and taught, wholly absorbed with Christ and wholly dead to the world. His enfolding of the mystery and practically living it nit cost him the loss of all things—position, fiends, worldly prospects, comfort, ease—and as he went on, his course narrowed, and in his time sore trial "all men forsook me—no man stood with me," he says. And again, "All they that be of Asia have turned away from me."

And have not the professing Church turned away from Paul and his gospel? And so great is the apostasy from Paul that a man is no longer counted sound in the faith who stands by him and "the mystery of the gospel" as revealed by him. The New Testament curtain drops on Paul in prison, and the Church turned away from him; and this mournful picture is what we see still. The Pauline witness is the chief testimony for these days, but the world virtually gives such as stand up for it a "prison," and the professing Church "turns away" from it, forgetful of the exhortation, "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner." Figuratively speaking, Paul is now a prisoner, and the mass of Christians have turned their backs upon him! If Paul were now amongst us he would hardly be allowed to preach, and he would have, we fear, to say, "All they that be in Christendom have turned away from me."

Let us not deceive ourselves: it will now take quite as much faith to stand by Paul and "the mystery of the Christ," as it would have done to stand by Noah and his preaching of righteousness and ark building before the Flood; yet therein, and therein alone, is the ark that will bear us safely over the seas of doubt, confusion, and error, that are surging over the world; but, depend upon it, as you widen your truth you will

narrow your following; for were Paul's gospel preached it would completely smash up everything of man's, and burst his "old bottles;" but as for those who know Christ in glory, and are pressing on to gain Him as their prize, they will be so occupied with Him, that nothing, however painful, that may stand in the way, will be taken account of if they may but reach Him, have Him as their own, be with Him, and like Him in glory forever. Oh! that I and my reader may be of those who can say truly, "While the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." There are always precious souls longing sincerely to know all that can be known of Christ personally, and in all the relationships in which He stands; and there is no doubt they will know more and more, for the Holy Ghost is here as the great minister of Christ, to guide us into all truth, to take the things of Christ and show them unto us; and we earnestly long to know Him at all cost; and let whatever knowledge He may impart flow down to others, that we and our beloved readers may together have our eyes upon our Beloved as we sit with Him at His table, and that our spikenard may send forth its peculiar fragrance.

Song of Songs, Lecture 8: A Company of Horses in Pharaoh's Chariots (1:9-11)

WE have now arrived at verse 9th, where the royal Bridegroom breaks silence, and tells forth his mind regarding his bride:— "I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver" (verses 9-11). On the principle of comprehending "with all saints," we got together as many saints, in their writings, as we had with us when residing last autumn in a beautiful rural place on a hillside in view of the Grampians; and we decided that it would be for edification that we allowed them, for this once, to give their measure of apprehension of the meaning of the comparison, rather than present our own thoughts: and this we will now do.

1. ROBOTHAM, 1652.— "According to this reading, my horses, the Lord doth liken His people to goodly horses, thereby noting the strength and victory which He giveth them over their enemies (Heb. 3: 15; Rev. 19:14). The horses and chariots of Egypt were in great request and estimation, not only in Egypt but in other countries, as the Scripture showeth. Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt (1 Kings 10: 28). And in Ezekiel 17:15, the king of Judah sent 'his ambassadors into Egypt that they might give him horses.' And the prophet Isaiah pronounceth a woe against such as trusted on the horses of Egypt, forsaking the Lord, saying, 'Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are many' (Isa. 31:1). Now by this comparison Christ setteth forth the glory and renown of His Church, in respect of her victories and achievements. Hence observe that Christ hath armed His people with spiritual armor, power, fortitude, and valor, to overcome all their enemies." These are no doubt blessed truths, but they do not seem precisely the truths indicated by this comparison.

As to rows and chains he says: "It is questionable whether this similitude of rows and chains is to be referred to the Church, as she was compared to the horses in Pharaoh's chariot, or to a woman. The comparison will agree to both. First, we may refer these rows and chains unto the Church, as she was compared to the horses of Pharaoh, taking it thus: Christ had decked and trimmed her, even as great princes do adorn their horses' bridles. He alludeth, no doubt, to the manner of those eastern princes who used to trim their bridles, and other kinds of furniture for the foreparts of their horses, with sundry kinds of ornaments, as gold, pearls, precious stones; as we may see in Judges 8:21-26, the king of Midian had ornaments of chains of gold and pearls about his camel's neck. Now by this comparison He meaneth, that there was no greater glory nor comeliness in these things than was in the outward parts and members of the Church." This seems to us a rather clumsy way of stating the great truth of the outward comeliness of the Church, when moving gracefully in the ennobling services of her divine Head and Lord.

"Or," he goes on to say, "if we retain the similitude of a woman, it is meant of earrings and jewels which adorn the face, as we have it in the prophets, I have decked thee with ornaments, I have put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck, and I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thy ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head: thus wast thou decked with gold and silver, and thou wast exceeding beautiful" (Ezek. 16:12-14). "Hence observe," he adds, "that the observance of the laws and holy rules of Christ do adorn the saints as pearls and chains of gold do the outward man. The observance of the rules of Christ makes men orderly, gracious, holy, and upright, all which are comely ornaments unto believers: —patience, humility, love, self-denial—these and such-like graces are the pearls and jewels of the saints. Observe also, that by the observance of Christ's laws the saints are guided, protected, and made victorious; also, that Christ hath not only endowed His people with inward strength and valor, but also with outward glory and beauty."

On verse 11 he writes, "A further increase of her graces, and some addition of rich ornaments. She is richly decked already, but her decking shall be yet more and more. She shall have the most excellent ornaments of gold and silver, which, wrought together, do set forth each other." On the "we will make," he says, "Most do understand Father, Son, and Spirit." And he stumbles on a great truth which he does not seem to see is a gorgeous ornament, "borders of gold with studs of silver," when he adds, "and the apostle, speaking of diversities of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:4-6, saith, that the diversities of gifts are of the Spirit, and the diversities of ministries to be of the Lord, and the diversities of operations to be of God." These are solid and edifying remarks, an echo of his predecessor Ainsworth as usual, as I suppose; but his Annotations was too ponderous a tome to bring so far.

2. DURHAM, 1668.—On verse 9 Durham writes, giving the connection, "Thou art neither so weak nor so black and unbeautiful as the world thinks thee and as thou esteemest thyself. My testimony of thee is better to be believed than either the world's or thy own, and I assert thee to be stately and strong, beautiful and comely. He sets out her stateliness, strength, and courage, by a similitude taken from horses. Are horses stately and strong? And is not a company of them much more stately, especially a company of Egyptian horses, which were the best in the world (2 Chron. 1:17; Isa. 31:1). And if any in Egypt were beyond others, certainly Pharaoh the king had such in his own chariots. Now (saith he) if these be lovely, strong, and stately, then thou art so; for I have compared thee to such. I have compared thee: I who know where true worth is. I have said thou art as strong as these; I have likened thee to them, and made thee like them. There is, then, in believers courage, boldness, undauntedness of spirit and unconquerableness; therefore it does not become believers to droop, faint, or be discouraged under difficulties." On jewels and chains of gold he remarks, "Grace puts much real beauty upon the person that hath it. There are here jewels and chains of gold; one grace never goes alone—whoever hath one grace hath all."

3. Dr. JOHN GILL, 1776.—Dr. Gill is very full, as usual, on this portion, saying nearly all that can be said, and a good deal that cannot be rightly said, I will give a few of his remarks on points that others have not touched upon. He says that the comparison is an appropriate one—

(1.) Because the horses in Pharaoh's chariot were a choice and select company. The Church of Christ is a chosen generation.

(2.) These horses were bought at a very great price. The Church has been bought at the great price of the "precious blood of Christ."

(3.) These horses being well fed, looked beautiful and pleasant; so the Church, fed on the bread of life, looked exceeding beautiful in His sight.

(4.) These horses were well cared for, having men to supply them with all necessary for them; so the Church is cared for by angels, and ministers, and Christ himself.

(5.) Horses have been and are much delighted in by princes; and Solomon's fancy ran so strongly this way, and he took so great a delight in those creatures, that he broke through a divine command (Deut. 17: 16, compared with 1 Kings 10:29) to satisfy and indulge his carnal pleasure; and many other princes have run prodigious and excessive lengths this way. Julius Caesar set up a marble effigy of his horse in the temple; Antonius Verus erected a golden image for his; Nero clothed his with a senator's robe, and told out a weekly stipend to him; Poppea Sabina, Nero's wife, had golden shoes made for hers; Caligula used to invite his to supper, and held out his golden cups to him; Alexander the Great built a city in honor of his Bucephalus; Cimon, the Athenian, buried his mares by his own sepulcher; and Commodus, the emperor, buried his horse in the Vatican. Now, as these creatures were the delight of princes, so are believers the delight of Christ.

(6.) Horses are stately and majestic, especially a company of choice ones, fitted to run in the royal chariot. And there is a stateliness in believers, especially when united together in gospel-order in a church state, having Christ as their righteousness, and possessed of His grace; in the enjoyment of His presence in ordinances; in their walking in love and unity with each other, and wisely towards them that are without; in having their conversation as it becometh the gospel of Christ; showing zeal for the truth, for Christ and souls—being thus blessed they may be said to be like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.

(7.) Horses are strong, especially a company of them joined together, and all pulling one way. So believers in Christ, strong in the Lord, can endure all hardships, go through all difficulties, withstand all temptations, perform all duties. And next to their abiding in Christ, the strength of believers lies in their union and close adherence to each other. They are like the bundle of sticks in the fable, which, whilst kept bound together, could not easily be broken, but, when separated from each other, were soon snapped asunder; which consideration should excite mutual love among believers, and an endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, by doing which they will not easily fall a prey to their enemies, but will appear terrible as an army with banners.

He goes on to speak of them as undaunted, orderly, and selected for the royal service, not running at random, but being fitted for service, were joined and coupled together, and so peaceably and orderly drew one way. So Christians are under the yoke of Christ, being joined together in gospel-bonds, and strive together for the faith of the gospel, perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment, and all speaking the same things, and agreeing together, without disorders, contentions, divisions, moving onward with spiritual gracefulness, like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot. "We have not received the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind."

4. "MEDITATIONS ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON" 1856.—The writer of this little book seems to have caught a glimpse of the idea of the verse when he says— "The point of the comparison is evidently the symmetry and decorations of the horses. She is adorned with chains and rows of jewels similar to their splendid trappings. The Lord has not only invested His Church with righteousness and beauty, but delights to adorn her, even as in Gen. 24. Abraham's servant puts upon Rebekah, who seems there to be a type of the Church, as the affianced bride of Christ, the golden jewel and bracelets, as in Ezek. 16, where the Lord's love to Israel is strikingly pictured, he says, 'I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck.' The Lord's love contemplates for us nothing short of the very highest results; it will not be satisfied until the richest adornments decorate the once wretched and unworthy objects of its choice. The grace which takes the beggar from the dunghill, and the poor out of the dust, pauses not until it has set them among princes, and made them inherit the throne of glory (Ps. 2: 8). While any room remains for a fresh ornament His is not the love to allow it to be unsupplied. To her who was already resplendent with jewels and gold, he says, 'We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver.'"

5. "THE SONG OF SOLOMON, compared with other parts of Scripture," 1852, says — "He strikingly contrasts His estimation of her strength, activity, and swiftness, and her exceeding beauty with her own sense of feebleness and acknowledgment of blackness expressed in verses 4-6. Chains of gold about the neck were always tokens of promotion, as when Pharaoh promoted Joseph, He arrayed him in fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck' (Gen. 41:41, 42); and when Daniel was promoted by Belshazzar to be the third ruler in the kingdom, he also clothed him with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck' (Dan. 5:29). But our adorning is not to be with gold or pearls, or costly array, but with good works' (1 Tim. 2:9, 10)."

6. Dr. MOODY-STUART (1860) says— "Specially the comparison to the chariots of Pharaoh has immediate reference to their swiftness. Christ making as though He would have gone farther, yet willingly overtaken, yields to the prayer of the soul that cleaves to Him in faith and love, and commending the ardor, the swiftness, the perseverance of her pursuit, He accosts her, To a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots I have compared thee, O my love.'"

7. Dr. BURROWS (1861) says— "In this encampment, where the bridal company are now supposed to be, the King would have His most splendid, equipage. The Egyptian horses were celebrated for their beauty, 'they were even exported to the neighboring countries, and Solomon bought them at a hundred and fifty shekels of silver, from the merchants who traded with Egypt by the Syrian desert.' In modern as well as in ancient times the mares are considered in all respects most beautiful, valuable, and desirable. Such a steed in a chariot which Solomon had brought out of Egypt by his agents for six hundred shekels of silver, was an object of great beauty, to the eye especially, when adorned with the costly trappings then usual. The Beloved does, therefore, naturally compare the bride to such a horse, in these words, which would be more correctly rendered, 'I compare thee, my love, to my chariot-steed or mare, from Pharaoh, or to my Egyptian chariot-steed.'

Though unusual in the present age, this comparison will appear beautifully appropriate when we call to mind still further the affectionate adoration with which these animals are regarded by the Orientals. Jesus would intimate, by this comparison, that there is in the Christian character something noble, adapted to impress us with respect, and command our admiration....

“The horse is here mentioned as an emblem of the energy belonging to piety. Sloth, lack of energy, indolence, detract from any character. We look for energy in what we would admire—not the energy of feverish irregularity, but that which results from the calm, harmonious movement of well-balanced powers....

“The horse may be the symbol of the activity that does not tire. The idea of beauty includes that of an elastic vigor of the frame, light, free from heaviness, and with power of enduring fatigue and exposure. These characteristics are imparted in perfection to the body and soul by grace.”

On verse 10th Dr. Burrows has given some good remarks. “The chariot horses were, in ancient times, more richly adorned than those for riding ‘the harness and trappings of such were extremely elegant; plumes waved over their heads, or fanciful crests rose gracefully in an arch above the ears, and descended in front to the nostrils; round the neck, immediately at the head, was an embroidered collar, ending in a rich tassel or bell; the bit, as well as many ornaments of the bridle and trappings, were of gold and other precious materials.’ A drawing given by Layard, of the head of an Assyrian horse, thus ornamented, is certainly very beautiful. The mention of the Egyptian steed in verse 9 naturally suggested the reference here made to the headdress of the spouse. Olearius tells us that ‘all the headdress that the Persian ladies made use of are two or three rows of pearls, which are not worn there about the neck, as in other places, but around the head, beginning on the forehead, and descending down the cheeks and under the chin, so that their faces seem to be set in pearls. This coiffure seems to be very ancient among the Eastern people.’ Royal brides are represented by Oriental authors as dressed after this manner. So, when the Caliph al Mamon went to receive Touran-Dokht, that prince found her seated on a throne, her head loaded with a thousand pearls, every one of them as big as a pigeon’s egg, or a large nut (?), which rich coiffure the Caliph resolved should be assigned her for her dowry. D’Arvieux, who describes Arab women as wearing pieces of gold coin hanging down by the sides or the face, adds, that they have chains of gold about their necks, which hang down their breasts. The words of this verse do, therefore, refer to the rows of strings of pearls and jewels ladies were in the habit of wearing as part of the headdress, and to the rich necklaces with golden chains over the bosom (Ezek. 16:11). The comparison of the horse refers to what may be called the vital energy or principle of the Christian life: this verse (10) expresses the virtues which may be superadded by grace. Such allusions are frequent (Prov. 1:9; 4:9; 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).”

On verse 11 he says, “The queen was distinguished by a crown (Jer. 13:8; Ezek. 16:12; Esther 2:17); and to the crown these words may refer. Struck with her beauty, as adorned with rows of jewels, the king wishes to give the finish to her head attire by placing on her a crown of gold, variegated with studs of silver. As in Ps. 21:3: ‘Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head.’ Whatever the exact ornaments here mentioned, the idea is that the Beloved would add to the beautiful ornaments already worn by the bride others of the most precious kind, devised and made by Himself. ‘Unto every one that hath shall be given.’... How much superior the character which is formed by the virtues made for us by God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit! Casting aside self-reliance, which is another name for pride, let us substitute these for reliance on the Holy Ghost: so that for us the words may be addressed, ‘Ye are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.’ The results of the artistic skill of man’s boasted self-reliance are enumerated by one who best knows the heart; which are these— ‘adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like’ (Gal. 5:19). The borders of gold with studs of silver made for those who depend on the Spirit include such jewels as ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance’ (Gal. 5:20, 21).”

8. Dr. OTTO ZOCKLER (1870) translates it, “to my horse in Pharaoh’s chariot;” —literally, “to my mare.” The singular “my mare,” evidently refers to a favorite mare of the king (comp. Zech. 10:3), to a particularly fine and splendidly caparisoned specimen of those four thousand beautiful horses, which, according to 1 Kings 10:26 (Sept.), Solomon had for his chariots; and more exactly to such a steed used on state-occasions in Solomon’s “Pharaoh-chariots,” —i.e. in those costly Pharaonic spans of horses, which, according to 1 Kings 10:28, 29, he had imported from Egypt, Solomon compares this mare of his, harnessed and magnificently decorated before stately Pharaoh-chariots.

9. Mr. ANDREW MILLER, in his Meditations (1862), has some precious thoughts on this portion— “The chariot horse, with its gorgeous trappings, may be the symbol of strength, swiftness, royalty, and willingness in service. No sooner has the charioteer taken his seat, than his steeds are in readiness to move off. They become impatient of delay—the raising of the foot, the movement of every muscle, plainly tell him, that if he be ready, they are quite ready. And then, how subject, notwithstanding their power, to the slightest touch of the guiding rein! Seest thou, O my soul, in their ready willing service a fair representation of thine own? Is it so? Examine all thy ways beneath the glance of the Master’s eye. Is there anything on earth thou wouldst dread more than to be turned out of His service? Remember, oh remember, that though, as a son, thou shalt be in thy Father’s house forever—as a sinner saved by grace, thou art saved forever—still as a servant, if thou art idling thy time, or spoiling thy work, it may be taken from thee and given to another. O most patient Master, keep thy servant ever girded, obedient, and ready for service; and caring only to meet Thy mind.”

But what are we to understand by “borders of gold with studs of silver?” May it not be a crown that is spoken of?... What then? Shall the restored royal tribe of Judah yet wear this beautiful crown in the land of Israel—in the holy city Jerusalem? Wondrous grace! Love divine! and will it be the united gift of the adorable Trinity?

Can Judah fail to remember, or can I ever forget, that thy royal brow, O King of Salem, was once in these very scenes wreathed with a crown of thorns? No earthly jewels lustered that crown, But the rich ruby drops from Thy holy veins well its jewels of eternal weight and imperishable value, Awake, awake! O my soul! meditate on the grace and love of Jesus! What wilt thou think? how wilt thou feel, when that once pierced hand places on thy head a garland of unfading glory? Shall thine eye be caught with the crown or dazzled with the glory? Oh no! the first glimpse of that “countenance transcendent” shall fix thine eye, and ravish thy heart forever I have compared Thee, O my love. Oh, how the heart delights in being so immediately, so individually, so distinctly addressed by Himself Amongst the myriads of the redeemed not one is overlooked or neglected by Him. “He loved me, and gave Himself for me,” will be the thrilling note in the song of all. His love in its eternal sweetness and fullness fills all hearts to overflowing, and turns all hearts into harps of sweetest melody to sound forever his unbeginning and never-ending love.

“I have compared thee O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver” (Song of Solomon, 1:9-11).

Song of Songs, Lecture 7: The Footsteps of the Flock (1:7-8)

THE earnest inquiry of the bride is, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” and the response given her is, “If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the Shepherd’s tents.”

The bride says, — “Tell me,” and the answer is personal— “If thou know not, O thou fairest among women.” How different when our Lord Himself tells us anything, compared with learning it at second hand! This was illustrated by different incidents attendant on the resurrection of Christ. When the women (and Mary was one of them to whom Jesus had appeared and said, “Go tell my brethren, that I ascend to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God”) who had been at the sepulcher, returned, and “told these things unto the eleven and to all the rest, their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not;” but when two disciples were on their way to Emmaus, and “Jesus himself drew near and went with them,” and expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, they said one to another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and when He opened unto us the Scriptures?” It is even so still when He is near and speaks to our hearts. The reason why there is so much cold Christianity is, that so many of even the people of God hear of the risen Christ only by report, and it is more like the recital of an idle tale than the personal interchange of thoughts and affections with a living Saviour.

1. “O THOU FAIREST AMONG WOMEN.” The Bridegroom’s voice speaks in tones of endearment. How the language of love insinuates itself into our affections! Love is the very element of spiritual communion—the, soul of Christianity. It is that which is the very nature of God; and when we are made “partakers of the divine nature,” we dwell in love; and when our blessed Lord speaks to our hearts, the word finds them capacitated to respond to His voice. The heart of Christ is ours. His love constrains us. His voice, saying “O thou fairest,” puts us all in movement; He wins our affections ere ever we are aware. He Loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it; and He regards all its members with the most endearing affection.

“A day is coming when many fair ones will be seen—there will be the king’s daughter all glorious within the Jewish bride, and many other daughters—nations converted to the Lord; but this one will be the fairest of the fair.” The Beloved gives no answer to her particular questions; He addresses herself; He speaks forth His unchanging love. She may have much to bemoan in herself; much may be said to her dispraise by others; but His first word is one which intimates His continued love.

He appreciates her beauty, though others and herself may call it blackness. For there is, in the ease of His saints, a heart-beauty which He who alone looketh on the heart can perceive. The hearts of His people are His, and He has only to say, “O thou fairest among women,” to bring out the fairness of the heart which He only can perceive. In the world beauty is regarded according to its outward appearance; comeliness is due to the symmetry and proportions of the parts, and the complexion—and such skin-deep beauty soon fades, and such comeliness turns to corruption; but the beauty of the heart, mind, and spirit, as well as the fair proportion of a life given to Christ, like the apostle’s who said, “For me to live is Christ,” is a beauty that Christ appreciates, and which will never fade.

“While,” says one, “the pious are despised by the world as possessing nothing of loveliness, Jesus, looking on the heart, beyond the mere accomplishments of persons and manners, beholds the saints as the fairest of all.” Heart has very little, if anything, to do with the fashionable world. The most accomplished there is most heartless. Speaking of the Court of Louis XV., a writer observes, — “Generations of luxury had given to the manners of court minions the polish of steel, and its hardness to their hearts.” All is outward polish and grace, while inward deformity and corruption. The devotee of fashion is at best but a whited sepulcher, beautifully garnished to the eye, but full of all uncleanness; his courtly bearing, an embroidered pall, which it has been the whole business of his life to weave, covering from the view of men, perhaps of himself, spiritual loathsomeness and death. God, who is love, begins His estimate of beauty by taking into consideration, first of all, the heart, and the heart purified by love. Whatever our outward circumstances, though unfavorable in appearance as those of Lazarus, we are beautiful in His eyes if the heart be pervaded by the Holy Spirit and be set on the Lord Jesus Christ. What a word is that in Romans—Beloved of God! Christ’s first word is one of love, “O thou fairest among women,” and there never will be a last word, for the love of Christ is perennial in its flow, like the river of the water of life, which proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. “IF THOU KNOW NOT.” —This would seem to indicate an ignorance which the Bridegroom had a right to expect should not have existed. Why need to ask? Why be away from His side? Communion seems to have been interrupted. We know that there is no such thing as fellowship with God being broken; but our conscious enjoyment of communion may be broken. We ought to be in close fellowship with our Lord continually, the best thing is to be thus: the next best is to use every diligence to have it restored when it is not enjoyed. Most part of God’s people, it is to be feared, have not been without these interruptions to communion. It is sad that we should be ignorant when the Word of God is shining with noonday brightness, and the Holy Spirit is present to guide us into all truth. The case of Balaam asking counsel is a beacon against inquiring of God about matters that are clearly revealed. When Balak sent messengers to him to come to him and curse Israel, he inquired of God whether he should go with the men. “And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them: thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed” (Num. 22:12). This was a plain and peremptory prohibition; but when Balak “sent yet again princes more and more honorable than they,” and urged him to come to him, he said to them, “Tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.” What “more” did he want after receiving the Lord’s absolute refusal? But he loved the wages of unrighteousness, and God permitted him to go, that He might show the “error,” “perverse way,” and “doctrine of Balaam,” as a warning against professing ignorance when God’s word on the subject is as plain as the sun shining at noonday.

Why ask guidance of God about matters of clear revelation? There need be no asking of direction about such things as partnership in business with the unconverted, marriage with an unsaved person, being members of philanthropic societies where Christ and Christianity are excluded, or about association in religious fellowship with the world; for “the Spirit speaketh expressly” on such points when he says, “Be ye

not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." But it must be granted that there is such a thing as honest ignorance; and the true bride of the Lamb that wishes to be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ, is honestly ignorant on many points, and needs information and guidance; and it will surely be given her by her gracious Bridegroom, that she may not wander in aimless uncertainty.

3. "THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK." —He does not say where He feeds—that our souls must find out. He said to His apostle, "Have I been so long time with you, and hast thou not known me, Philip?" And He says here, "Go thou forth by the footsteps of the flock," etc. Christ is our great model, and He hath left us an example that we should follow His steps; but there are things in which we have also examples of men of like passions with ourselves, "whose faith follow," says the Spirit. We are to follow their faith, not their failure.

The father of the Jewish nation, and also the father of the faithful, Abraham, was one whom the God of glory called to go forth from the land of idols, and trust the Almighty; and he went forth, not knowing whither he went. God had said, "Get thee out from thy country, thy kindred, and thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." "If thou know not," "I will show thee:" but you must go forth first, as a matter of faith. God expects the obedience of faith from His children. "Abraham believed God and obeyed," and thus has left his "footsteps of faith" all through the Word of God, that we may see in his faith and fact, as in others, of that galaxy of faith in Hebrews 11., "the footsteps of the flock," and go forth by such footsteps. Said Paul, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11.) Again he says, "Brethren, be ye followers together of me, and mark them that walk, so as ye have us for an ensample" (Philip. 3:17).

"The footsteps of the flock" lead us out of the world. No Israelite, on the night of the exodus from Egypt, needed to be at a loss to know what to do; for full direction had been given them—the blood had sheltered them—the roasted lamb had been eaten—all was in readiness, and the whole flock of Israel went out by night under the leadership of Moses and the guidance of the glory cloud that went before them. Their path was illumined even in the night of judgment by the heavenly brightness of the presence of the God of Salvation. The footprints of the flock all pointed out of Egypt, and towards the glory of God. And so is it with us: the grace and word of God set us in movement. "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13).

Faith always sets the soul in motion Christ-ward, and He has gone forth from everything of earth by the Cross of Calvary, and we are to be following "His steps," and the footsteps of His flock, which in all ages have marked an outward movement from the world in its every form. Daniel and his brethren went forth even when under the power of Babylon. David went out from Saul's court. Paul went forth from Judaism, and counted all his gain but loss that he might win Christ, and he sought the footsteps of the flock, for "he assayed to join himself unto the disciples," and kept by the flock of God. Hearing, reading, knowing, and enjoying Christianity are not enough: we must "go forth by the footsteps of the flock:" go forth from "companions," "false teachers," "traditions of the elders," worldly associations, and every species of human invention in the way of ecclesiastical institutions, and following the footsteps of the flock of God, as you see them in apostolic times, be leal-hearted, loyal, and true to our Divine Shepherd. True Church position is laid down in the Word, both doctrinally and practically, and nothing but culpable ignorance keeps any saint from knowing it, and nothing short of setting self above Christ can make any one refuse to take it. Be not always on the inquiry; but "go forth" at once, and dare to be true to Christ, though the heavens should fall. Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, and John, were men of faith and their actions proved it: they all went forth at the call of God, and counted not their lives dear to themselves. We must be in the place of faith if we are to be honored to do the works of faith; or enjoy the reward of faith. Abram on the hilltop, in communion with God, could deliver Lot from the power of the kings, and even benefit others: but Lot could work no deliverance, because he had coveted the well-watered valley, pitched his tent toward Sodom, and eventually had sat as a magistrate in the gate of that doomed city.

The solemn midnight cry, "Behold the Bridegroom! go ye out to meet Him," has been sounded out of late years with a clearness and distinctness such as have not been heard since the days of the apostles, and the Bride of Christ is going forth to meet Him from everything of self, sin, Satan, and the world—not in spirit only (which is a delusion) but practically, rejoicing that they are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Paul does not say, "I suffered the loss of all things for Christ" spiritually, but remained within the camp of Judaism, and got the place, and opportunity of service for my brethren, for which my training fitted me, and by my position, talent, and education, had influence among them that no other man could have; but he gave up Judaism immediately that God revealed His Son in him, came out at once like an honest man really, and "suffered the loss of all things for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." This is a day when you will find the great body of professors saving themselves in a most adroit and pious manner, and shirking the cross as soon as some practical demand is made upon them for the sacrifice of self: interest for the glory of Christ, and the promotion of His objects, truth, service, and testimony. Such conduct may give them well-watered plains, ease, comfort, and connection by marriage with good worldly society in Sodom; but where in all this is that faith which will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, in the appearing of Jesus Christ.

"The footsteps of the flock" are now difficult to find in such a broken condition of the Church as we now have; for where is "the flock of God"? We must look to the Word of God alone to find these "footsteps," so as to be sure that we are right; and there is really no difficulty in seeing in it "the footsteps of the flock," as it existed in apostolic times. All the Christians were together, being all of one accord, of one mind, and separated to God from the world, and the religion of man in the flesh: they celebrated the dying love of Christ together on the first day of the week; worshipped God by the Spirit together continually; continued in prayer, praise, and loving fellowship, and were all one family over all lands; and all who had any gift from God for ministry, used it freely for the good of the whole body. Teachers taught, pastors fed the flock, evangelists carried the testimony of the gospel to the world, and brought in souls by conversion into the Church which centered around Christ Jesus, and not anything of man or earth. The interests of men were disallowed, and the objects of Christ, Himself, His saints, and His work engrossed the attention of the saints, and they lived only for Christ's glory.

But if you hold up the mirror of Holy Scripture to the religious assemblies of our day, where will you find a perfect reflection of this apostolic church? Yet nothing could be more unseemly than for young Christians to be sitting in judgment on "the Churches." Happy is it for us all we do not need to do so: we have simply to look for and follow "the footsteps of the flock," as we find them in the New Testament. This saves us from wandering hopelessly in the modern ecclesiastical mazes of man's "many inventions," and spending precious time to no good purpose.

Where Christ is the center—not man; where there is liberty of worship, and freedom for the exercise of all the divinely-given gifts the Lord may have bestowed in the unity of the one body, for the edification of itself in love; where holiness is maintained, purity of doctrine and godliness of life, and every link with the world broken, there you have "the footsteps of the flock;" and where these are wanting, however

venerated, patronized, or imposing any of man's institutions may be, they can have no claim on the consciences of the saints of God. "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is," and the very genius of Christianity, which is gathering by the perfect love of God, by the Holy Ghost, through the word of the gospel, to a perfect Christ who is Lord of His Bride, Head of His body, which is dwelt in by the Holy Ghost, who is administrating this new work for Christ; all this teaches us that Church fellowship is regarded as of supreme importance in God's eyes, and not to be made a matter of convenience, far less of self-will.

Why is it that young Christians so soon lose their freshness and first love? Because of their lack of true Christian fellowship. They may be converted in a warm evangelistic meeting, where the spirit of life and love is breathing; but they go back to places where there may be no gospel, or no Christians who have any truth to help them on in the Christian course; and there being in such a fellowship is like a spark of fire falling into a pool of water. Christians who have the good sense and conscience to go where the truth is fully preached, Christ alone exalted, and where the saints of God are gathered by the Spirit for worship and the breaking of bread, apart from the world, and in the unity of the body of Christ, grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; and instead of losing their first love, their love abounds more and more in knowledge, and in all intelligence; and an apostle, were he here, would write to such of their "work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:3); and on sending a second letter, he might thus write: "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth" (2 Thess. 1:3). It were a libel on the Holy Ghost to say that first love must wane. It does so generally; but why? The first love of the Church of Ephesus never waned, until there arose among themselves men speaking perverted things, to draw away disciples after them, and grievous wolves entered in, "not sparing the flock" (Acts 20.) They ate their meat "with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God," as long as "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." When Christ is our only center and object, and we are gathered to Him alone, our love will increase more and more, and we will make progress in the divine life: but we must not think to enjoy spiritual prosperity, and make advancement in love, grace, knowledge, and Christian experience, unless we follow "the footsteps of the flock;" for divine ends are compassed only by using divine means. We are expected by God to avoid self-will and all affecting of singularity, by taking the good old way, the beaten path, "the footsteps of the flock." "The footsteps of the flock," as given in Holy Scripture, lead to Christ Himself leaving self, men, and all human ecclesiastics entirely out of the question. Christian fellowship on the divine basis is of very great importance.

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2).

4. FEED THY KIDS BESIDE THE SHEPHERDS' TENTS. —Communion with Christ is always to be maintained, also fellowship with His saints; but the ministry of the Word is not to be neglected. The language may indicate nearness to Christ, when beside the tents or His shepherds; out it suggests to us that the under-shepherds of the Chief shepherd are to be stuck to by the Church, if her young ones are to be properly fed. "Lovest thou Me?" said Christ to Peter. He answered, "Thou knowest that love Thee." "Feed My lambs." As the books, companions, and training of youth have a great influence on the afterlife for this world, so is it in the Church of God. The thoroughness of the gospel we believed, and the decision of the person who was instrumental in our conversion, will tell powerfully on our afterlife.

And it is of all importance that young Christians keep close to "the shepherds' tents," and do not wander away into places where they can receive no spiritual instruction, or only very imperfect views of divine truth. It is heart-rending to see the apathy of Christians with regard to their growth in the knowledge of Christ; and that some make no conscience of listening to the worst preaching within their reach! They are not so idiotic in temporal things. They go to those shops that are known to keep the best goods, and they would not think of buying inferior or adulterated goods, either. For food or wear, if they knew it: and yet you will find them frequenting places of worship where they acknowledge they get no food for their souls—or very inferior or adulterated food. They know that there is splendid food within reach of them— they meet With Christians who attend such places, who put them to the blush by their love, devotedness, service in the gospel, and knowledge of Holy scripture; and yet they will not "go forth by the footsteps of the flock," and get "beside the shepherds' tents."

And what can we think of those who attend "places of worship" actually and openly connected with this present evil world, and where they "glory in their shame"? The apostle John saw the mother of harlots sitting on the beast, drunk with the Mood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus; sad yet the Spirit takes for granted that some saints are even in connection with her, for the Spirit's "word of exhortation" is, "Come out of her, my people!" Where may saints not be? silly sheep! The lord have mercy on His saints for their unfaithfulness to Him, and deliver them from starving their own souls, and dishonoring Him, and being a stumbling-block to the world. In Christ's day there was a vast number of shepherds in Israel; but He looked upon the multitude and had compassion upon them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd, etc. Christ gives shepherds to feed His flock, and, says an old writer, "When the devil wants to cry down truth, and spread error, he draws souls away from the shepherds' tents." If any person were seeking to draw saints away from a full-Christ ministry, be very sure that it is of the devil. It is of the greatest importance for young Christians to be filled with truth for their own spiritual well-being, stability, progress, and usefulness; end it should be the aim of older Christians to teach them as much as they themselves know, and take them with them "beside the shepherds' tents," that those who are well-taught ministers of Christ may teach them more deeply in Divine things. There is truth which would sanctify them, which they may never know otherwise. It is well for Christians to meet together for prayer and praise; but "the Church of the living God" is not only the true place of worship, but the center of knowledge, for it is "the pillar and ground of the truth," —there is truth nowhere else, and there you will get it "as the truth is in Jesus;" and as "God hath set in the Church teachers," Christ will give them, through His servants, such teaching as will produce "holiness of the truth" —not mystic or self-imposed piety.

Beloved, make conscience of personal communion; of spiritual worship; and of growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:— and that you may do so, give good heed to His gracious words: "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents."

Song of Songs, Lecture 6: The Shepherd and His Flock (1:5-7)

BEFORE going on with our present subject, I think it likely to be of service to impress he subject of our last Lecture on the minds of our readers if I give a few quotations to show what is the precise meaning of the figures used when the bride says— "As the tents of Kedar; as the

curtains of Solomon" (ver. 5).

"The form of this strongly-marked contrast," says the "Illustrated Commentary," "would lead us to conclude that a magnificent state-tent belonging to Solomon is here intended by the word rendered 'curtains,' and opposed to the black goats' hair tents of the Kedarene Arabs. The oriental kings usually possess one or more rich tents to be used when occasion required. In the Arabian book of 'Antar' there is a description of one which the hero received from the King of Persia, and which he caused to be pitched on the occasion of his marriage with Ibla. When spread out it occupied half the land of Shurebah, for it was the load of forty camels; and there was an awning at the door of the pavilion under which four thousand of the Arabian horse could skirmish. It was embroidered with burnished gold, studded with precious stones and diamonds; interspersed with rubies and emeralds, set with rows of pearls; and there was painting thereon—a specimen of every created thing,—birds, and trees and towns, and seas and continents, and beasts and reptiles; and whoever looked at it was confounded by the variety of representations, and by the brilliancy of the silver and gold; and so magnificent was the whole that when the pavilion was pitched the land of Shurebah and Mount Saadi were illuminated by its splendor."

This is, of course, an exaggerated poetical description, particularly as to the size of the pavilion; but yet the exaggeration is not so great as might be imagined. Marco Polo describes Kublai Kahn's tent as being so large that ten thousand soldiers might be drawn up under it without incommoding the nobles at the audience.

At the famous marriage feast held by Timor Beg (Tamerlane) at Canighul, the royal tents were gilt and adorned with precious stones. Each tent had twelve columns of silver inlaid with gold; the outside was scarlet and seven other colors, and the inside was lined with satin of all colors. Their curtains were of velvet and their ropes of silk. At the encampment of the same conqueror, in, the plains of Ourtoupa, the pavilions were richly ornamented and hung with curtains of brocade covered with golden flowers. At other times we read of tents "covered with cloth of gold and tartaries full nobly;" and at the grand encampment at Menecgheul, the tent of Timor was under a canopy supported by forty pillars, and was spacious as a palace; in the middle of it was a throne so ornamented with precious stones that it resembled a sun. More recently Nadir Shah, the conqueror of India, had a superb tent covered on the outside with scarlet cloth, and lined within with violet-colored satin, ornamented with various figures of animals, flowers, etc., formed entirely of pearls and precious stones. The contrast between such tents and those of the Arabian shepherds is great indeed. "I am black as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon."

Kedar's tents were those of the poor Bedawins, which are always exposed to the rays of the sun, and must, by constant handling as well as exposure, appear blacker and less attractive than those of Solomon, who, being a splendor-loving king, may be assumed to have adopted the custom of oriental monarchs of living in tents once in the year in some charming district, and in the utmost elegance and splendor. The scene was likely that of Solomon's pleasure-grounds, which stretched away along the Wady Urtas, south of Jerusalem for several leagues; and in these beautiful gardens the royal tent, adorned with the regal magnificence of the richest sovereign of the world, would appear in beauty and comeliness a thorough contrast to the tents of Kedar, away in the far wilderness, dotting the desert with dark spots. This is the forceful illustration of the blackness of the bride as seen in the wilderness, and her beauty as seen in the gardens of her royal bridegroom.

We now come to our present subject, as we have it in verses 7th and 8th: "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" etc. This is the bride's request, as if addressing her Beloved.

1. "O THOU WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH." —This is decided change for the better, for she is now happily occupied with her Beloved Himself, and she leaves off talking to "the daughters of Jerusalem," regarding either her own blackness or comeliness. Self is out of the scene. It is a sad, but sometimes a necessary, occupation to try to clear one's character in the eyes of others, and especially of carnal professors. The apostle Paul had to do this, as in the case of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5-8) but he felt it to be a heavy infliction, a waste of time, and, in comparison with being engaged with Christ Himself, a sort of folly. "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me" (2 Cor. 12:11).

A Christian, when engaged in vindicating himself for the Lord's sake, is on a hazardous mission, and may be in danger of shipwreck on the rock of self; and while occupied with setting one's self right, or setting doctrines or brethren right, one never can get to the same elevation as when Christ Himself is before the eye, and filling the soul's vision, and positive truth about Him is before us. Even Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11, does not appear to the same advantage as in Philippians 3, where he is on the stretch to know Christ. When we are occupied with evil, we cannot get, in communion, beyond the truth that meets it, and that keeps us in a lower place of communion that if Christ and good were before us. Paul when dealing with saints at Corinth or Galatia is in different condition from that in which we find him when writing to saints at Ephesus or Colosse. There are persons who shut you up so that you cannot let out even the amount of truth there within you; and there are others so magnetic that they draw you out even beyond what you knee you possessed. But when in presence of Chris we are drawn out perfectly by Him in desire and love, and we delight in intimate and endearing fellowship. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." His mission, as His nature, is love. When the Holy: Ghost is shedding abroad the love of God in the heart, and drawing out our souls to an exclusive occupation with Him, it must be that our hearts are going forth to Him in such longings as must intimate that there is a peculiar and mighty attraction in Him; and yet few of us attain to the constant enjoyment of such a bright flame of love as would warrant us in addressing Him in this endearing language— "O Thou whom my soul loveth." "My soul loveth" is the word. We would all readily join in if it had been, My soul ought to love, for we acknowledge the obligation; but it is surely a poor sort of love that flows only because it ought. True love pours itself forth in full flood because it has no choice but do it—it flows out naturally towards the loved object.

It is to be feared that we do not rise up very often above the region of appreciation, and we would feel in all honesty obliged to satisfy conscience on this score by saying, as another has done, "The word appreciation seems more fitly to express the little I know of this blessed matter than the idea of an earnest, ardent affection. What is there in existence, I inquire that I care for more than my Saviour—that I would prefer to Him? What is this? Is it love? Who else, what else, is loved more? But, oh! the day draws near when these eyes shall see the King in His glory. Then shall this cold dull heart be ravished with His beauty, and burn for ever with a pure flame of perfect love for Him alone."

2. "WHERE THOU FEEDEST." —The Beloved is here represented as a Shepherd feeding His flock The longing bride, who had formerly been subjected to the anger and degradation of her mother's children, seeks after the loved one of her soul, the one who having been exposed to the ill treatment of those who ought to have acted otherwise, one finding little sympathy, rather stupid staring, al her profession of love, among the "daughters of Jerusalem," is shut up to search out the loved Shepherd, and learn from His own lips where He is now feeding His

flock.

It seems that “in carrying out the design of the allegory the regal encampment is here represented as moving from place to place in search of green pastures, cooling shades, and still waters, under the guidance of their shepherd King.” And the bride seems to wish to proceed in the immediate society of the royal Bridegroom; for she can only feel happy, even amid the new and splendid objects which surround her, when He for whom she had forsaken all, and to whom her heart is wholly given, is just close beside her.

The Lord is represented both in the Old and New Testaments under the figure of a Shepherd. He came unto His own, and He entered by the door; and by the works He wrought He showed He was the sanctioned Shepherd, who was in the confidence of the owner of the flock. Israel of old was Jehovah’s flock. “Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps. 77:20); and when He had established them in the land of Canaan we read, “He chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds.... He brought him to feed Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance; so he fed them according to the integrity of his heart and according to the skilfulness of his hands” (Ps. 78:70-72); and after they had gone into captivity, He shows by His prophet that it will not be forever. How gracious and beautiful are His words regarding the gathering of His now scattered sheep of the house pf Israel. “For thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I, even I will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been mattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God” (Ezek. 34:11-15).

When the Lord Jesus was upon earth He spoke of Himself as the Shepherd, “the Good Shepherd,” who giveth His life for the sheep. The ministry of John the Baptist had gone before to prepare a flock who should really receive Him, being morally prepared to do so. All Israel ought to have owned Him as “the Shepherd of Israel,” for they were His flock by right, and Jesus proved that He had entered in with the full sanction of God, as the Shepherd, by the door; but He came in vain for the bulk of the nation, for they proved to be “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” They refused to own or follow Him.

But there were some like the disciples and the restored blind man in John 9 (who was cast out by the Pharisees and who was received by the Son of God), who became “the sheep of His pasture.” Of the man referred to Jesus may have thought when He spoke the parable of John 10, “He called His own sheep by name, and leadeth, them out and when He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” He was gone forth, himself, first by the rejection of the religious leaders, and the man they cast out was Grist across the path of the Good Shepherd; and to such He said, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

The necessary action of the Lord’s ministry in grace, because of the rejection of the mass of the nation, was to attach to Him and lead out the believing remnant in Israel who received Him into a place outside of the old Jewish fold formed by ordinances of which Jerusalem was the center, and to separate them from every ground of connection with Israel’s God, except that which was found in Christ himself. The language of His ministry to rejecting Israel was, “Then I will not feed you;” but “I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock.” “And how blessed to be under the care of such a Shepherd, though it be outside all man’s religion, and apart from the whole array of Israel’s divinely-appointed ordinances. For it was in the maintenance of these in opposition to a living faith as the ground of connection with God that the claims of this blessed Shepherd, were disallowed.”

When the Lord Jesus looked upon the multitudes, He had compassion upon them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd; and He then called and ordained twelve apostles, and sent them out to preach and heal in His name, and enjoined them to confine their efforts meantime to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But His claims were disallowed, “He is despised and rejected of men;” and, in resurrection, He again sent them in rich grace to Israel first, and if they had repented, the once-smitten Shepherd would have returned, and the future blessedness described in that thirty-fourth of Ezekiel would have been theirs, after He had set aside the claims of every false shepherd that may have neglected or preyed upon the flock. But they refused him as the Shepherd-King, and now they are scattered throughout all lands. It will be in Israel in the day of glory, and among an earthly people, that His proper Shepherd-character will be displayed according to Isaiah 40:10, 11, “Behold, the Lord will come with strong hand, and His arm shalt rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd.”

But His work is now going on outside this earthly fold: He is gathering out saints, uniting them in one flock— “the flock of God” —and He is giving them all the means of feeding which Hi wisdom and love can suggest (Eph. 4.) There are three Psalms, the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, which I would set before you in connection with Christ crucified as “the Good Shepherd;” Christ raised from the dead as “the Great Shepherd,” and as coming in His glory as “the Chief Shepherd.” As “the Good Shepherd,” He has given His life for the sheep, and He can now take a new position as dead and risen, and say, “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved; and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). He now presents Himself not as the door of a fold but of salvation. The Jew who would now be secure and fed, must abandon the fold which Levitical ordinances threw around him, and find the Shepherd outside of all ordinances by faith—as a sinner finds a Saviour; and not only are the outcasts of Israel gathered now in this way, but any man may enter by this door of grace. Christ has taken an entirely new position: instead of being set down, as He must yet be, on the throne of His father David, He has been set down upon the throne of His Father, God, in heaven, as the salvation of God to the ends of the earth, and the Church is now being called by grace, washed, justified, sanctified, and united to Him there; and is being taught, guided, filled, and fed by means of the Holy Ghost present on the earth in her midst; and security, liberty, and pasturage are found by His flock in following Him outside everything of the form of a Jewish fold. It is thus Christ is with us and in us.

This time and the work of Christ in it, as “that Great Shepherd of the sheep,” may be represented by the 23rd Psalm, with which we are so familiar. It is a psalm of confidence in our Great Shepherd’s grace and care. We are set in the wilderness between the cross on the one hand, and the glory on the other; and the precious psalm indicates the saints’ trust and hope. “Tell me where thou feedest,” is the inquiry; and when the heavenly Shepherd, our loving risen Lord, is revealed to us in the fullness of His grace, we go in and out and find pasture, as the

answer is found in “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters, He restoreth my soul,” etc.

In the midst of so much confusion in the pro. fessing Church, one crying one thing and another crying another, and the more part knowing not wherefore they are come together—like the mot at Ephesus— virgin souls are greatly tried, and sometimes not a little perplexed, regarding their position, and are tossed to and fro by conflicting opinions of men “who seem to be pillars,” and they are never safe as long as they feel in bondage to any man, opinion, or thing: and, feeling that increasingly as they grow in the knowledge of “the mystery of God,” they go direct to Christ Himself sad inquire where He is feeding His sheep now. He fed them once on the mountains of Israel—after that, as we have seen, He called them out of the nation around Himself, as the Good Shepherd on earth—then, after He ascended, He formed them into a new flock, and fed them on Himself, as “the Bread of God” and “Water of Life;” and they were all together, one unsceptered, beautiful flock—the flock of God which He had purchased with His own blood. But now that that flock is ruthlessly scattered and torn by grievous wolves, “tell me where Thou feedest.”

Ah! are there not many sheep scattered hither and thither in this cloudy and dark day, who are famishing, weary, and worn, and sick of human pretension of giving them food, while all the time their souls are empty and their hearts sore, who are ready to take up the cry, “Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest” thy flock, and who on going to Him, ever find that they “shall not want”? A general direction may be safely given with regard to this: Where there is most of Christ’s feeding given, and the sheep are happy, healthy, and holy, so filled with His good things, that they are worshipping in the Spirit and working actively for their Lord, that is the place where you ought to be, for the full truth of Christ is never entrusted to teachers who are dishonoring Christ by being in a wrong position.

Again, here is another thought. Christ Himself should be everything to Christians, and the Bible is full of Him, and the Holy Ghost has come down to guide His people into all truth, therefore both teachers and taught ought to avoid having pet portions of Scripture or favorite themes, lest they cease to find pasture there; for their gracious Shepherd may have gone from them in the meantime, and He may be waiting till their longing souls make them follow Him into “green pastures,” where the sole of their foot has never yet trod. What fields of freshest pasture He would feed us in if we would only cease to regulate ourselves and allow Him to lead us forth by His Spirit, Word, and servants! How sad that the dear saints of God are living so far beneath their privileges, especially that they know so little of Him who is the sun and center of grace and glory! That blissful theme—that wonder of love and grace that fills heaven with delight— “Christ and the Church” —the subject nearest the heart of Christ—is not known to one Christian in a thousand; and the great future of Christ, as laid down with all plainness in the prophetic Word, is a green pasture where Christ is specially feeding His own just now; and if we will not long and cry for it to Him, who alone can feed us, we are not likely to get much other pasture or Go grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our great Shepherd fed the multitude at the period of the Reformation, more than three hundred years ago, with the great truths of justification by Faith and sanctification by the Spirit, as well as the sacrificial death of Christ; lout the saints stopping short with those blessed doctrines, and not going on to perfection, their grandchildren in all lands went straight into rationalism! And now, while we tenaciously hold these precious truths, the special feeding of souls—the peculiar feeding of our gracious Shepherd for our day that will prevent the issue of the awakening of this century being infidelity (if the Lord should tarry), must be effected by means of “the present truth” which He has raised up men to bring out regarding CHRIST, the Church of God, the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth, and all the doctrine that arises out of our heavenly calling and the daily waiting for His Son from heaven. He is feeding His waiting, loving, longing saints at present very specially on the heavenly, because the judgment of the earthly is so near, and He would have us gathered out of the doomed world around Himself, the despised and rejected of men, and the beloved and accepted Son of God; for as is the heavenly, such are they also who are heavenly. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. For their sakes sanctify I myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. Mere Reformation truth, though precious to rest on for one’s soul’s salvation and the pardon of sins, has failed to bring saints out of the world;—on the contrary, we find them settling down comfortably with orthodox Protestantism, like good Jews on the earth. Peculiar, Pauline truth— “the great mystery, Christ and the Church” —is that which Christ is now using with rapid and mighty effect in hastening saints, who have the love of the bride of the Lamb, out of the doomed place, and giving them power to witness in the place of scorn and rejection for their absent Lord, and warn this Sodom-like scene that the vengeance-cloud is hanging over it, and that “when they shall say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.”

3. “TELL ME WHERE THOU MAKEST THY FLOCK TO REST AT NOON,” etc.—Noon is the time when the Eastern shepherds gather their flocks around the wells, and in shady places, by the streams of water. “They shall feed in the way, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, for He that hath mercy on them shall lead, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.” A traveler writes, “Looking to the east, flocks and herds were seen spreading through the undulating valleys. In one place we saw many of these gathered together under a shady tree, waiting till the excessive heat of noon should be abated. At other times the shepherds gather the flocks beside a well, as we afterward saw at Lebonah, where many hundreds were lying down around the well’s mouth.”1 The “rest at noon” is specially needful for “the flock of God.” Noon, with its fierce heat, may be the emblem of trial and persecution. The Lord Jesus so uses it (Matt. 13.) “The day has not more certainly its noon, a time when, in the East, all are glad to seek repose in the shade by springs, to slake their consuming thirst; than has the life of the believer its period of trial or sorrow.” The Lord Jesus is our divine sympathizing High Priest, and He gives al needed succor, and causes us to lie down in the green pastures and beside the still waters, and re stores our soul. Noon was also the time for near fellowship; and it is generally in times of trial that the soul obtains such fellowship as it enjoy; at no other season. The reason by which she enforces her longing search is, “For why should I be as one who turns aside by the flocks of thy companions?” This is taken by some to mean, “Why should I be as one veiled?” as a suspected person (Gen. 38:15). This is hard to bear by one who can address the Lord, “O Thou whom my soul loveth.” But sadly true is this word:

“Many who profess to be the shepherds of God’s sheep can but little understand the path of one who is walking with the Lord, outside of all the prescribed rules of man, who desires to please the Lord, if it should offend all else beside. There is such a thing as an energy of love that rises above all mere human arrangements, and holds communion immediately, not mediately, with the Lord—an energy that could not tarry for the routine of forms. Such an one is most likely to be misunderstood and misrepresented, like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who prayed with an inward spiritual energy, which Eli, the priest of God, did not understand. But the Lord knows the motive of the heart, and the spring of the energy. Just as the loved one was suffering in her soul from the mean suspicions of others, the Beloved appears for her comfort. This is the first time we hear the Bridegroom’s voice. But oh! what grace flows out to her! what words drop from His lips. “O thou fairest among

women," is the first utterance of His heart. Enough, surely, to sweeten the most bitter trial.

The bride, in this divine song, is extremely anxious not to turn aside by the flocks of His companions. She has such love to Him. Such is her esteem of Him, and her delight in His fellowship, that she would feel unhappy if not in His society, seeing His face, hearing His voice, and basking in the noontide effulgence of His light and love.

"Feed My lambs—feed My sheep," said the risen Lord to the restored under-shepherd, Peter: and this was on the back of the inquiry, "Lovest thou Me?" answered by, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And yet this very Peter had to be withstood to the face, because he was to be blamed for lending his apostolic sanction to reducing Christ's flock at Antioch to "the flocks of his companions" (Gal. 2.)

And to the elders of highly-favoured Ephesus Paul gave this earnest warning— "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood; for I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30). And such men did arise; and the Apostle Peter tells how successful they would be in doing mischief— "There shall be false teachers among you.... And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." By means of such "false teachers" the churches of Galatia were alienated from Paul; and at the close of his life, he writes to his "son Timothy," "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me." And in the time of his trial at Rome he writes, "All men forsook me."

The constant tendency of man is to turn aside from God and Christ, and the prophets, apostles, and true teachers of the faith; and to listen to "the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." The flock of Christ is "one flock" the "companions" have "no end of flocks;" very man who likes to set up as "companions," and to have a flock of a particular pattern, may readily have one, for the bulk of Christians know so little of their Bibles that it cannot now be said, "I know... how thou hast tried them who say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:2); but even those who may be Christians, will be found embracing all the isms under the sun, if those who manage such "flocks" are only sufficiently clever, earnest, devoted, and dogmatical. Where is the "Lord's freeman," the true-hearted saint, who is so intent on pleasing aim, that he follows Him "whithersoever He goeth"? This seems to be All Fools' day in Christendom, when nearly all who profess the name of Christ have turned aside by "the flocks of His companions." And the toleration of fools is astonishing: ritualist, rationalist, legalist, nationalist— "Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites!" "For ye suffer fools gladly: if a man brings you into bondage, if a man devours you, if a man takes of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smites you on the face" (2 Cor. 11:19, 20). But the "man in Christ," who is "nothing" but an "earthen vessel, full of grace and truth," and who persists in directing saints and sinners to "THAT GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP, JESUS ONLY," is thought little of! The evil she dreaded is that which has come or the professing Church. They have turned away from Christ himself and His "one flock" (John 10:16), to men, organizations, systems of doctrine forms, rites and ceremonies; and there is a propensity to follow saints instead of the Saviour and only true, loyal hearts, who dread turning aside, are preserved for loving and intimate fellowship with the Master Himself. "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:5-8).

Song of Songs, Lecture 5: Black but Comely (1:5)

IT is when enjoying the highest communion realizing something of the light of the know ledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ experiencing much of His love, drinking deeply of the living water that He gives, and ourselves dispensers of rivers of living water to others, that we realize in an eminent degree our own unworthiness, sinfulness, and unlikeness to God; just as here the bride, when drawn by loveliness, brought into the King's chambers, glad and rejoicing in Him, remembering His love as a continual supply for her thirsting desire, that the words so unexpectedly break upon the ear, "I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem."

The apostle Paul, who lived the most transcendental life heavenward and Godward, was the most sensitive of saints manward; and would not give offense either to Jew, to Gentile, or to the Church of God. And that the weakest saint in that Church might not be stumbled even at the allowable liberty of stronger Christians, he conciliates, explains, concedes; and in his epistles gives such instructions as we find in Romans 14, 15, and 1 Cor. 8, which are fitted to lead more advanced Christians to deny themselves, and graciously abridge their own liberty in Christ, rather than offend or injure the consciences of their weaker brethren.

And what was this but a following of Christ, who, lest He should "offend them" —the exactors of the temple-service tax—instructed His apostle Peter to pay their tribute-money, Himself working a miracle rather than give trouble, or cause of stumbling to the tax gatherer (Matt. 17.)

Here the bride acts in a similar way towards the "daughters of Jerusalem." She may seem to be all unfit for the high honor to which she is admitted, and she frankly admits it, but still at the same time she affirms her comeliness: "I am black but comely."

There is a variety of view on this head; but that which appears to us most probably right, is, that the black refers to the estimation in which others held her: and as it was external and visible, it, refers to her circumstances rather than sins. But as it is a great Scripture truth that the Christian in himself is conscious of his own blackness just in proportion to his nearness of communion, we shall let a brother in the Lord give us a brief won in reference to the application of this confession in regard to sin in believers.

"I am black but comely." Needed truth at all times, if we would preserve a well-balanced mind! The more thoroughly we know the worthlessness of the flesh, the more shall we appreciate thy worthiness of Christ, and the better shall we know the work of the Holy Spirit.

When the total depravity of human nature is not a settled reality in the soul, there will ever be contusion in our experience as to the vain pretensions of the flesh, and the divine operations of the Spirit.

“There is nothing good whatever in our carnal nature. The most advanced in the divine life has said, ‘In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.’ How sweeping! ‘No good thing.’ But can it not be improved by diligence in prayer and watchfulness? No, never: it is wholly incurable. Long, long ago, this was affirmed by the God of truth. See Gen. 6: ‘And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;... and God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me.’ It is ‘evil,’ ‘only evil,’ and ‘evil continually;’ that is, plainly evil without any good, and evil without any cessation; and this is said of all flesh, observe, not of some merely: so that all are included.

“True, in some we may find nature polished, cultivated, and refined; in others, rough, rude, and rugged, —but it is carnal nature in both. We may not be able to bend a bar of iron; yet it may be so beaten out as to become quite flexible, but it is the same iron still. Its appearance has changed, but its nature is the same.”

“Well, admitting that to be true as to our carnal nature, why call it ‘needed truth and necessary to a well-balanced mind?’ Because it enables us to distinguish between flesh and Spirit, and to know from which the thought, suggestion, or inclination may come. Seeing they are both in us, and the one unmixed good and the other unmixed evil, this is all-important. Endless confusion, trouble, perplexity, and in some cases deep melancholy, are the unhappy results of ignorance on this point. I mean the subject of the two natures. Nothing that is good can spring from our carnal nature. Suppose I meet a person who is in deep concern about his soul, and earnestly longing to know Christ and salvation: I know for certain the Holy Spirit is at work in that soul. such desires after Christ and salvation are good, and could never spring from a nature that hates both God and Christ, and loves the world better than heaven. The soul may indeed be in great distress and full of doubts and fears as to the issue, and even refusing to be comforted. But in God’s mind it is saved already. And when it believes the truth; it will rejoice. The good work was begun in the soul of the prodigal when first he said within himself, ‘I will arise, and go to my father.’ The Spirit of God will fully satisfy every desire which He creates. Christ himself is the perfect answer to every desire of the heart.”1

“I am black” is a confession only made by true saints, or really quickened, Spirit-convinced souls. “I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” The real state of the sinner will never be confessed until a man is a saint. Saul the Pharisee never said, “sinners of whom I am chief;” and we find him writing it only after he had been thirty years a devoted servant of Christ. Before this he had recorded himself as “least of the apostles,” and “less than the least of all saints;” but it is only as he is stepping from a prison to glory that we find the record— “sinners of whom I am chief” The man who writes of himself— “as touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless,” when he was Saul the young Pharisee, writes himself chief of sinners, as “Paul the aged” Christian.

But, as I have already indicated, the words refer more to outward circumstances than to inward sin; and were I to enter into a full treatment of the subject, I would consider it: 1. Personally; 2. Ecclesiastically; and 3. Nationally, —or, in other words, I would regard it in connection with the individual Christian, the saints collectively, and Israel nationally.

1. THE CONTRAST. —God’s Zion is now “black:” as another has said, “Jewish experience being more of an outward, temporal, typical character the blackness of which he speaks is external.” It is a darkness of complexion—she is sunburnt: the warning word of the prophet has come to pass. “There shall be burning instead of beauty” (Isa. 3:24). And because of this she feels the curious gaze of the daughters of Jerusalem: “Look no upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me.” The time was when the daughter of Zion was beautiful and glorious, a praise in the earth. “Thy renown,” says the prophet, “went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith, the Lord God” (Ezek. 16.) But because of her ingratitude and unfaithfulness, she had been reduced to the sad condition of a poor sunburnt slave. The Prophet Jeremiah also, in his “Lamentations” over the downfall of Jerusalem, describes, in the most touching manner, not only what she once was, but what through affliction and sorrow she had become. “Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire. Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick.” Well might he exclaim in the bitterness of his soul, “How is the gold become dim? How is the most fine gold changed?” The term “black” is generally used in Scripture as expressive of affliction, sorrow, persecution. “My skin,” as Job says, “is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat” (Job 30:30). It is emphatically so with disobedient Israel. But here the confession is sweetly coupled with faith in Christ, and so becomes morally the truthful expression of all believers. “I am black but comely:” black as in myself, whiter than snow in Christ.

This will be the language of the God-fearing remnant of Israel in the latter day, who shall have passed through the depths of Jacob’s trouble: sorely scorched indeed shall they be by the burning heat of “the great tribulation;” not only shall they suffer persecution under Antichrist, the great oppressor, but even their own brethren after the flesh shall be turned against them. “Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified; but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed” (Isa. 65:5). This is what the now joyous bride refers to, “My mother’s children were angry with me: they made me keeper of the vineyards.” Like another Ruth, the vineyard which she was compelled to toil in become her own. And happy now in the love of her gray Deliverer, and rich Lord, she could speak freely (what she had passed through, and what she still was in her own eyes— “Black as the tents Kedar—comely as the curtains of Solomon.” I this national reference, if the bride be the representative of the beloved city, Jerusalem, the earthly capital of the Great King, the “daughters of Jerusalem” may represent the cities of Judah. Hence we can understand their presence and place on so many occasions, yet never reaching to the position of the bride in the estimation of the King. According to the word of the Lord, Jerusalem must ever have the pre-eminence, “For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually” (2 Chron. 7:16).

With regard to this view, as applied to the literal Jerusalem, how touching the description of a dear friend of ours on coming in sight of Jerusalem, and walking its streets for the first time! — “We rode on, reached the summit, and could only weep! Strange and deep are the emotions that sight creates! O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that stonest the prophets, and killest them that are sent unto thee” O city of the Great King! once so high, now so low! O scene of the death, agony, and crucifixion of the Saviour, who will yet establish His earthly throne in thy midst—do our eyes behold thee? can it be? is that Mount Zion, which God loves? Oh, how our eyes devoured it! and, I must confess it, how disappointed were our expectations.... Another thing for which I was hardly prepared was the ruined state of Jerusalem. I knew it had

been repeatedly ruined and rebuilt, but did not expect to find it now literally a mass of ruins. Such it is to an indescribable degree ruins of ruins repaired and ruined again, ruins mended with ruins, ruined buildings built of the ruins of former buildings, and on the ruin of others. Heaps of stones everywhere and nowhere, save in a few European structures, anything else but ruins. The seventeen captures the city has sustained, of course account for this. Indeed, we are told the present level of the city is far above the original one. It is raised many feet on the ruins of its predecessors. You may dig down, down, down, and only get deeper in ruins and traces of antiquity.

“But oh! how can I describe to you the present state of the city within the walls? My courage fails in attempting it! No words can convey an idea of it so well as the blessed Lord’s prophetic expression, ‘Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles.’ ‘Trodden down,’ trampled under foot, crushed to the dust, and groveling in it—that is the idea the first walk through its dark, dirty, ruinous, crowded, narrow, ill-paved streets, conveys to one’s mind. Inexpressibly sad, sorrowful, and astonishing is it to see with one’s own eyes the meaning, the fulfillment of these words. The motley melee of all nations that throng the streets, or dark filthy lanes as we should call them, especially at this season, when some thousands of Greek and Latin pilgrims are in the city for Easter; the variety of false and foolish forms of worship celebrated on these God-chosen and God-honored spots; the Turkish soldiery (a most degraded, ill-paid, evil-looking set of nondescripts), parading the areas of the Temple and Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and excluding Jew and Christian alike from the large quarter formerly occupied by the house of God, now by the Mosque of Omar; all these things speak in loud accents, ‘Trodden down of the Gentiles.’

“One’s very heart sinks at the spectacle! and at each step is ready to weep at the pitiful sights and sounds on every hand. Can this be Jerusalem? is this Mount Zion? we said continually to each other, as we ascended the steep street leading to the top of that hill, not more than twenty feet wide. A very roughly paved gutter is all the road, and there are no sidewalks; it is filthy beyond description, and the smells so offensive, that twice I was absolutely sick! Oh, how unlike that city that was beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth! —how unlike the Jerusalem that was, and the Jerusalem that shall be!

“This is the only thought that relieves the mind in contemplating her present degradation and misery. It is all foretold by the Spirit of prophecy, and the same unerring Spirit has also predicted another and a brighter state of things. God will yet create ‘Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy,’ and we who weep over her now will rejoice over her then. It is easy to see what a city it might be, easy to see that it is ‘beautiful for situation,’ and capable of being one of the most imposing, singular, and romantic of places. There is great beauty now in its deep ravines, in the steep, precipitous Vale of Hinnom, and the softer valley of Jehoshaphat, in the rocky summits of the city walls and towers, and in the varying views of surrounding hills and glimpses of distant country. But it is on what it might be that one likes to dwell, not what it is, for the sweetest spots on and around it are alike marked by ruin any degradation—misery is stamped on everything What a withering thing is the frown of God! Till that is removed, till Zion ‘in the blood of the victim shall wash her deep guilt away,’ her desolation—her awful blackness—must remain, and al that pass by must be astonished at her!”

What a contrast when she shall appear like a bride adorned for her Husband, and be as a royal diadem in the hands of the Lord!

2. THE CHURCH. —The Church may say, “I am black but comely.” In spite of all that the Lord Jesus has done, and in spite of the presence teaching, exhortations, and warnings of the Holy Ghost, the Church that we read of as being so fair in all its life, grace, spirituality, separateness, devotedness, love, liberality, self-sacrifice, labor for Christ’s name, service in the Spirit, and all the unity which shines forth in its early days, how black has it become! Fallen from first love, faithless to her absent lord, slothful in His service, and dallying with the world, she has so sadly fallen that there is now no visible Church at all of the fair proportions, symmetry, and beauty it possessed when, on that memorable epoch of Pentecost, “all who believed were together;” and she is black with desolations, divisions, carnal connections, and worse than heathen corruptions; wasted by the ravages of worldliness, selfishness, and satanic delusions; broken up into a multitude of sects, and ranged under a mass of sectarian banners, instead of being the fair and engaging spouse of Him whose bride she professes to be. The desolation, degradation, humiliation, and trodden-down condition of the professing Church is, to those who have the Spirit-anointed eye, a thousand times more depressing and saddening than the terrible condition of Israel. Yet in the midst of this chaos the comely members of the body of Christ may be distinguished, and when the time of blackness is past He will present His Church to Himself, with exceeding joy, in all the comeliness of her bridal beauty “a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle; or any such thing—holy, and without blemish.”

How “comely” will the Church appear when the stature of the “perfect man” is reached!— how beautiful when it has grown into a holy temple in the Lord, and it appears in its perfection of beauty when in the glory of God, as in Revelation 21. when its several gates are of one pearl, its pavement of burnished gold, its walls of all manner of precious stones, and the Lamb is the light of it!

We do not dwell on this aspect, but hasten to speak of the expression as it may be viewed in reference to individual Christians.

3. THE CHRISTIAN. —Personally the Christian says, “I am black but comely.” —The leading thought here is, that the circumstance of the bride’s being “black” in appearance was due to the action of others, not her own. “I am black—the sun has looked upon me—my mother’s children were angry with me— they made me the keeper of the vineyards—mine own vineyard have I not kept.” The explanation of her swarthy color is thus given. It is poetic language, and means, in simple prose, that she had been sunburnt when compelled to be under the sun’s scorching rays, engaged in the drudgery of the lowest menial, which she had been put to, through the jealousy and hatred of those of her own house who disliked her; and that that position was not her natural one, nor yet self-chosen. “Mine own vineyard have I not kept,” is generally explained of neglect or unwatchfulness; but it is not a confession of her unfaithfulness, but an explanation or excuse for her being in the degradation to which she had been subjected. It is as if she had said, I was not taking that low, exposed situation of my own accord, out of selfish attention to my own interest. No; the vineyards were not mine which I was forced to keep. I got this blackish hue not deservedly, but as suffering for righteousness’ sake. I would not for the world have done those things they attribute unto me. My soul loathes and abhors them. “I am black” in reputation only, because of the calumnies, misconstructions, unrighteousness, jealousy, and persecution of my “mother’s children;” but in reality I am “comely.” I belong to the “upright,” and “the upright love thee.”

This seems to be the true meaning; and the connection is obvious. She had been speaking of great privileges and enjoyments in the King’s chambers, and ended with “The upright love thee.” “I am black, but comely,” is her next word; and thinking of how she had been regarded and treated by others, she clears her character as being “upright,” and hence “comely,” by the explanations which she offered, the bearing of which we have just given.

In this, as another says, we are only like our Lord. “Christ, who was ‘the Lamb without spot and blemish,’ ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,’ was the One of all others whom His mother’s children’s ‘anger and causeless hatred made black’ beyond all, so that they called Him devil, blasphemer, mover of sedition, heretic, innovator in religion, Antinomian, and every evil name, and at last cried, ‘Away with Him! away with Him! Let Him be crucified.’ It is enough for the disciple to be as His Master; and if the visage of the Man of sorrows was so marred more than any man’s, and His countenance more than the sons of men, your countenance, believer, will oft be clouded by affliction, necessities, distresses, infirmities, reproaches; yet never are you more ‘comely’ than when your mother’s children are angry with you for your Master’s sake; and being driven from among them, the sun scorches you, for then, most of all, the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14).

Do ye think the Scripture saith in vain, “The spirit that is in us lusteth only to envy?” It has been so from the beginning. Joseph was black in the eyes of his brethren because he was comely in his father’s sight, and had a, future indicated superior to theirs. They said, “Behold that dreamer cometh,” and they cast him into the pit in the wilderness; drew him out, sold him to a passing caravan, who took and sold him into Egypt, where again, through calumnious reports, he was reputed so “black” as to be cast into prison; but God took him thence and made him prime minister of Egypt, and the saviour of his father’s house as well as of that land and the world; so that he could see the Lord’s hand in all his trials, and that, through His comeliness put upon him, he was “comely” in his circumstances, as he had been all along in his character.

David was a man after God’s own heart, and He anointed him with His holy oil to be king over His people Israel; and yet even his “mother’s children” imputed naughtiness of heart and motives of vanity, when he came to visit them with presents in the valley of Elah, when Goliath of Gath defied the armies of the living God, and he would go out and fight with him. Even after he had slain the giant and delivered Israel, he is of so little account that he is in the lowly place of minstrel to the unhappy Saul; and by and by he is so incensed against him, and David becomes so “black” in his eyes, that he hunts him as a partridge on the mountains, and he is compelled through his anger against him, and his incessant persecution, to become an exile from the land over which God had anointed him to reign. And yet how “comely” David’s conduct towards Saul all the time he was pursuing him with murderous intent Even when in his power he would not stretch forth his hand against him; and his lament over him and Jonathan after they were slain by the Philistines is truly “comely.” “The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places.” “How are the mighty fallen!” “The shield of Saul is vilely cast away as though he had not been anointed with oil; the sword of Saul returned not empty, Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their deaths they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions: ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul.” He was in Saul’s eyes “black as the tents of Kedar:” but in reality he was “comely as the curtains of Solomon.”

God’s “comely” one is always the world’s “black” one. He whom God anointed, and sent to unfold His grace, though He was full of grace and truth, was despised and rejected of men; His own received Him not. “This is the Heir; come let us kill Him;” “they hated me without a cause.” And when the cities of Galilee rejected Him, and considered Him as having “no form nor comeliness,” He falls back upon His consciousness of what He was as the beloved Son of God, and that He was so “comely” in the Father’s eye that He had “delivered all things into His hands;” and, when He was defamed, He entreated, and at last asked. His accusers, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” So full of moral beauty and purity was His whole life, that He was making manifest and condemning sin in the flesh by His Holiness wherever He passed as “the Light of the world.” And like Joseph and David, who were types of Him, God interposed and vindicated Him whom earth had treated as “black,” by raising Him from the dead, setting mm at His own right hand, and crowning. Him with glory and honor. “Thou art fairer than the children of men,” is the Spirit’s testimony. He who was the world’s foulest is heaven’s fairest. His “mother’s children” “slew and hanged Him on a tree;” “but God raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory.”

And He warned His disciples that they might expect similar treatment to that which they had given Him: “Ye shall be hated of all men for my, name’s sake. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of His household.” And in preaching the gospel, His disciples were subjected to incessant persecution and tribulation, and that from the anger of the Jews— their “mother’s children.” The record of them reads thus, “Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us and they please not God, and are contrary to all men;” and now mere professors and carnal Chris tians take their place, and blacken all God’s fairest of men.

Who so like Christ, or so fully in communion with His mind, as the apostle Paul? And who so black? “We are made a spectacle to the world to angels, and to men. We are weak, despised we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; reviled, persecuted, defamed, we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1 Cor. 4): yet who so comely? He writes of himself, “Giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; but in all things commending ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6).

I do not know a more apposite parallel passage than this to the one we are considering: “I am black, but comely.” (See also 2 Cor. 11 and 12). “Black as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon.” How different spiritual Christians are from what they are thought to be! They are certain to come in collision with ordinary profession if wholly devoted to Christ, and to be regarded as “black,” be suspected, distrusted, regarded as scheming, crafty, crooked, extreme, unreliable, forward, proud, self-righteous, and hypocritical; but to the inner circle that really knows them, the longer they are known the more engaging, attractive, and “comely” they become. But the really separated ones will have few to appreciate them when they live, or to stand with them in wholehearted consecration to the Lord or in testimony to His name, just as “Paul the aged,” who, when a young man, had “multitudes” to hear him and applaud, and follow with him, but when nearing the end of his course (as in Second Timothy), complains, “All they of Asia have forsaken me.” “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” So when we follow Christ for His own sake, and reek not of reputation, goods, friends, position, or prospects, or even of life itself, then will even Christian friends drop off right and left, as they did from Christ, and leave us alone; but as He said, and Paul proved (2 Tim. 4:17), “not alone,” for the Father will be with us, and the Son will sustain us, and the Holy Ghost will fill us with divine power, and so the preaching shall be fully known, to the praise of the glory of His grace. “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to

whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Song of Songs, Lecture 4: The "Daughters of Jerusalem." (1:5)

THIS is the enigma of the Christian’s condition while on earth, whether looked at as in contact with sin, sorrow, trial, or persecution (verse 3). Occurring just at this particular part of this out sacred poem, the expression, “I am black but comely,” would suggest the train of thought that was passing through the mind of the loved and favored one. It is the utterance of one who is in near and hallowed fellowship, consciously within the royal chambers, and tasting that love that is better than wine; and do we not know that it is just when we are enjoying most of our Bridegroom’s presence and love that we feel our own natural blackness, and also our comeliness by His communicated grace, and we cherish sensitive desires, that less instructed and experienced Christians may not take offense at what they see us pass through of persecution, reproach, or trying providential dealing? Hence we find the bride now addressing the daughters of Jerusalem in this divine apostrophe: “I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem; as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon,” (ver. 5). That we may the more fully grasp the meaning, let us consider, firstly, Who are they who are intended by the daughters of Jerusalem; secondly, What is the meaning of the language addressed to them; and, thirdly, The force of the illustrations employed, “as the tents of Kedar—as the curtains of Solomon”

“The daughters of Jerusalem” are repeatedly mentioned in this divine “Song” In chapter 2:7, “I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roses, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor awake my love till He please;” and here the restlessness and want of spiritual perception in communion is indicated. The carnal Christian or babe in Christ, which these “daughters” may stand for, have no idea of spiritual delicacy, but rush on in the flesh, walking “according to men,” not waiting for the motions of the Spirit within to intimate the spiritual propriety of doing this at one time and that at another, as having “the mind of Christ.” “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” In chapter 3:5, the same charge is given. In verse 10, Solomon’s chariot is said to be “paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem,” and they are invited, as “daughters of Zion,” to “behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” In chapter 5:8 the bride’s charge to these daughters is to tell her Beloved, if they find Him, that she is “sick of love.” They seem willing to be taught about the Beloved, though very ignorant; and the bride discourses to them of His excellences and beauty in chapter 5:10-16, and ends by saying, “Yea, He is altogether Lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” They propose to seek the Beloved along with her (chap. 6:1). But at verse 4, chapter 8, the same charge is given them as in verse 5, chapter 2, showing that they have not yet become “spiritual” and able to discern the delicate proprieties of spiritual intercourse. They are not at the same height of intelligence or communion as the bride, nor have they the tender, strong affections of “the virgins;” nor, on the other hand, are they “mother’s children” of such a kind as would have Paul say of them, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: they are really “daughters of Jerusalem,” but not of the virgin-class who cherish exclusive love to the Royal Bridegroom.

These “daughters of Jerusalem” represent the great body of Christians, — they are many “daughters of Jerusalem;” “there are threescore queens and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number; my dove, my undefiled is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the choice one of her that bare her” (chap. 6:8, 9). How true is it that in the church there is frequently only a few in a district, or even in a congregation, who are living in near fellowship and spiritual communion with Christ, as if His affianced bride, while the rest of even converted ones are living in a coarse, careless way, having no continued enjoyment of Christ and salvation, but are off and on with the world—engrossed with its cares and business, not living in separation from its pursuits, enjoyments, amusements, entertainments, policy, motives, maxims, and ways; and who selfishly take the benefit of the work of Christ, but are not supremely occupied with the person of Christ, entirely devoted to His service, nor yet ready to take up their cross and follow Him! To such Christ is not known further than one who has come between them and the punishment due to them for their sins. Such persons are known by their Corinthian admiration of gift, their prattle about preachers, their sectarian attachment— “I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I of Christ,” as if Christ could be divided, or Paul crucified for them! The Epistles to the Corinthians show the kind of people symbolized by “the daughters of Jerusalem.” “I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?” “Carnal” does not mean unsaved, but converted people walking “according to men” and not “according to Christ,” who had no will apart from the Father’s, lived and walked in the Spirit, and did all His works so as to please Him that sent Him. The common run of Christianity among even converted people is that of the “carnal” Corinthians; for running after gift, talent, outward show, and divisions, envyings, and denominational zeal characterize the great bulk of even Christian people. Take away all talk about gifts, ministers, churches, outward prosperity, and the services, duties, and objects of Christian effort, and how few you would find to take the place of the bride in the King’s chambers beholding His beauty, engrossed with Himself, and in a heart-absorbing enjoyment of His love! The “carnal” may be reckoned by thousands, the “spiritual” by tens; but one who is “spiritual” gives more; joy to Christ, and is of more real benefit to Christ’s cause and people, than a thousand who are “carnal.” It is a privilege and an inestimable blessing to be “babes in Christ;” but sad, shameful, and dangerous, to remain such!

What is the Spirit’s special method of treating the “carnal” state that may be glorying in men and “flesh”? It is the bringing in of the high fellowship into which we are called (1 Cor. 1:9); the introduction of “Christ and Him crucified” as the death-blow to worldliness (chap. 2:2); the indwelling of the Spirit as the ground of holiness individually and together (chaps. 3:6.); and the power of life in Christ’s resurrection (chap. 15.); and that charity which is above everything (1 Cor. 13.); and all this in connection with the Second Man, not the first, — “the last Adam, a life-giving spirit” (chap. 15.) The carnality of ecclesiastical worldliness is nipped in the bud “by the finger of God” in these Corinthian epistles; but notwithstanding the warning of God, we grieve to see that even Christians in our day are so generally holding by a Galatianised gospel and a Corinthianised Church, as to regard “the daughters of Jerusalem” as the normal type of Christian per faction! Where are the preachers whose one theme is Christ Jesus the Lord? Where are the Saints whose one object is God’s glory, and whose constant aim is the conversion of souls? If the pews are filled, the church membership increased, the funds flourishing, and preachers attractive and popular, though they may only be spinning discourses out of their own heads, and leaving people in total ignorance of the great leading truths of their Bibles, all is accepted as right and proper, and the mere show of outward ease and success is rested in, instead of fruit unto God. “Are ye not carnal, and

walk as men?”

The Epistles, when known and realized by us in the Spirit, impart such “full knowledge of Christ” as takes us out of babehood into “full age,” gives us to apprehend our standing in a risen Christ, after “God’s love with us has been perfected;” and we “reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus,” and “worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Oh, how different is true spiritual Christianity from the ordinary profession of religion! But this is just what makes it so difficult to leave the rank of mere “daughters of Jerusalem,” and take the rank, and place, and experience of “the bride, the Lamb’s wife!”

And this not rising up to the true Christian ground, but remaining “daughters of Jerusalem,” is “a sore evil;” for when true gospel— “the gospel of the glory of Christ”—is preached, and the Christian’s place in Christ risen and glorified is unfolded, and entire consecration and devotedness is manifested, and those who are filled, taught, and guided by the Spirit go beyond the denomination’s measure of truth, and tell out the whole mind of God as far as they know it, offense is taken at it by those “daughters;” and when the real living saints, full of virgin love, enter by grace into the King’s “chambers,” and have loving “fellowship in the Spirit” with Him, and Christ alone is brought on the foreground, there is likely to be, as ever there has been, the offending of “the carnal;” for could it be otherwise, “then is the offense of the cross ceased.” But “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world:” and it is worthy of remark that in Galatia and Corinth the Spirit’s one antidote to both legality and carnality is THE CROSS. Were the cross truly preached, it would wither up worldly carnality, and set aside a legalized gospel. But Christ crucified and glorified is not known, and hence there is nothing so ridiculed and resented an entire engrossment with HIMSELF, and wholehearted devotedness to His work. And from the intimate fellowship of the Spouse, the transition is natural and fits into the need of experience, to an acknowledgment and explanation to those who know nothing higher than being “daughters of Jerusalem.”

There are, of course, necessarily different stages of Christian experience, as the Spirit intimates in different parts of the Scriptures. Says Paul, “Let us, therefor, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” There are of course the imperfect. “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect.” If we would know who the “perfect” are, we should read Philippians 3. It is evident from Paul’s case they are such as are having Christ as their alone object, and not ordinances, privileges, attainments, experiences, frames, feelings, or doings. They are the people who can say practically, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”

There are others who are not thus “perfect,” and if they settle down with their limited knowledge and experience, the world will come in, they will lose the freshness of their early affections, become “dull of hearing,” and give great anxiety to those who watch for their souls. It was this that gave Paul such concern of soul for the “Hebrews” as made him write so faithfully to them in those arousing terms— “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).

The measure of a perfect man is, Christ himself “being made perfect” in glory (Heb. 5:9); perfection is nowhere found but in the Man in heaven, and we are so only as we have the knowledge of our position there in Him. It will not do to say, “I am at the foot of the cross,” for Christ is not there, but the cross has put Him in heaven; for we see Jesus, on account of the suffering of death on that cross, now crowned with glory and honor; for the Captain of our salvation has been made perfect through sufferings—that is, He has so glorified God in being made sin for us, that God has raised up His Son Jesus, and given Him glory. He is now perfect in resurrection-life, righteousness, and glory. Everything has been perfectly accomplished on earth for God’s glory and our salvation, and Christ has entered on his perfect priestly place as our Saviour, inside the veil in Heaven itself, and we must have Christ’s perfect place or none. The cross puts every believer in association with Christ in heaven; and oh! how it burdened the spirit of the apostle to find his people so “dull of hearing” in Palestine, Galatia, and Corinth, that they did not apprehend and realize a position in which he lived and moved as in his spirit’s home. Nothing seemed to be such a burden on his heart as to keep the saints up to their privileges—to keep them in living fellowship with Christ, and in fresh contact and association with heavenly things— “the things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God,” for he well knew that that was the only means of spiritual growth and the divine preventive of worldliness. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” When our measure of perfection is Christ glorified, the portion we have is what He has—life, glory. Our hope is to be thoroughly identified with Him in all the perfection of life, righteousness, and glory in Heaven. All our affections and associations are with Him where He is.

This explains the apostolic exhortation, “Therefore, leaving the principles of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to perfection” (Heb. 6:1); for “perfection” refers to Christ “being made perfect” (chap. 5:9), i.e. glorified. He is crowned with glory and honor in heaven. And now He is there, He has associated me with Himself in that place. I can see that Christ has been through this world, so as to sympathize with us in all our sorrows and difficulties. He has borne my sins; and where is He now? In heaven; and I am there too in spirit, and He will bring me there in fact. Where he is, “is His being made perfect.” The work is done; and now He is showing me the effect of that— showing me the walk belonging to the righteousness which He has wrought out. He has taken my heart and associated me with Himself; and he says that is the “perfection” for me to go on to.

Where did Paul see Christ? In glory. Now, he knew Him in heaven; and this great truth was revealed to him, that all the saints on earth were as Christ. He was “chief of sinners,” because wasting the Church of God. He discovered the carnal mind to be enmity against God, not subject to the law of God; he proved it in his own experience; and now he found there were saints not in that state—those quickened with Christ and associated with Christ in glory: “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.” These were not associated with the first Adam, but with the second Man in Christ. That was their position. These people whom he had been persecuting were Christ. What broke him down was seeing Christ in glory, and all these associated with him. Now he learns that he is dead to law, flesh, world. His thought was— “The Christ I want to win is a glorified

Christ. To win Christ as my prize in glory may cost me my life: never mind: that is my object." As to the first Adam, he is weighed in the balance and found wanting. He is not in the flesh any longer, but in the Spirit—not in Adam, either innocent or fallen, but in Christ who has died, risen, and is perfect in glory. The old thing is entirely past—dead to sin, the world, the law—dead and risen again, having another object. He is alive from the dead because Christ is: he is "accepted in the Beloved:" he has the conscious. ness that this work of Christ put him into a new place (not glorified in the body yet): this was the "perfection." What was the state of his affections then? "That I may win Christ" was his desire. "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." This was his object: his mind was full of it.

The different stages of Christian life, knowledge, and experience, are indicated by the apostle John when he addresses the several classes of Christians under the heads—1. Fathers; 2. Young men; and 3. Little Children. The word in verse 12 is different from that in verse 18. In 12th it is "children," and designates all believers. In 18th it is "little children," and points out very distinctly a separate class of believers. The "fathers" have "known Him that is from the beginning" —Christ. Christian experience cannot go beyond Christ; all the exercises and experiences of Christians, which are often so much made of are only the means of getting at this— "knowing Him that is from the beginning." The young Christian is full of vivacity and joy, and is occupied much with himself, but "fathers" are occupied with CHRIST, let joy come or go: and Christ known, possessed, enjoyed, makes US solidly and calmly happy. There is uncommon steadiness when Christ is all. This is the "fathers'" character, they "have known Him that is from the beginning:" there is no development of that—nothing to add. "Young men" have overcome the wicked one; little children have known the Father: but being only "babes," they are warned against being seduced. And even babes have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things; od, if wise to look to the Lord for spiritual discernment, they need not be seduced by all the specious snares, allurements, and entanglements: which would lead away from Christ. For if in perplexity, they have only to ask of anything. Is it "of the Father"? —if not, then it must be of the world, however religious it may appear, "for whatsoever is not of the Father, is of the world." But how Satan succeeds as "an angel of light" to seduce babes and corrupt their minds "from the simplicity that is in Christ!" and then they settle down at the outset of their course, content with being babes only; and by-and-by they become selfish, hard, cold; and carnal, great sticklers for orthodoxy, but silent about Christ; admirers of men's persons, talents, and acquirements, and honored in the flesh by association with such, but not devoted to the real work of winning souls; busied about the outward business of the house of God, but not careful to have living fellowship maintained with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They leave the place of "the chaste virgin" espoused to Christ, and take the ordinary place of being merely "daughters of Jerusalem."

This may seem like a digression, but it is not one: but, as we delight in giving the truth which ensures the good rather than merely expose the evil, what we have now given may, with God's blessing, lead some beginners to avoid the state indicated, and realize at the outset the place and experience of the bride of the Lamb, and with full intelligence and senses exercised to discern both good and evil, be able to say, "I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem."1

Song of Songs, Lecture 3: Drawing, Communion, and Joy (1:4)

THE fervent words of the Moravian hymn—

have been frequently upon my tongue, as my mind has been ruminating on our next word in this divine "Song"— "Draw me; we will run after Thee;" and I have been thinking that the writer must have had this verse before him in composing it; for his second verse is a celebration of the royal Bridegroom's love, and seems as if he had entered into the thought, "We will remember Thy love more than wine," —

"Draw me; we will run after Thee: The King hath brought me into His chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in Thee; we will remember Thy love more than wine; the upright love Thee" (verse 4).

Here we have:— 1. THE DRAWING PRAYED FOR, AND THE RUNNING PROMISED; 2. THE BRINGING INTO THE KING'S CHAMBERS; 3. THE GLADNESS COUNTED UPON; 4. THE LOVE CELEBRATED; 5. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO LOVE.

1. "DRAW ME: WE WILL RUN AFTER THEE." —In wondrous love, God our Saviour drew us before we ever breathed such a prayer as "Draw me." He said, when on earth, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44); and when this takes place, "the manslayer did not more willingly free from the avenger of blood into the city of refuge, than a sinner, sensible of his state, does to Christ for salvation." We will never forget the melting's of soul—the drawings and moving's of love—that drew us to our Beloved, "by a sweet omnipotence, and an omnipotent sweetness." They came we knew not whence; they wrought we knew not how: but the mantle of love was over us ere ever we knew where we were; and, lo! the Lamb stood before us as He had been lifted up, and His own word was verified in our experience— "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me." And this is a drawing which we cannot resist, when once we know Him; for as hundreds of patients are drawn from all parts of the world to a physician of world-wide celebrity, so are we drawn to the Great Physician when his fame reaches us, and we realize our need and really believe that He is able to save and heal our souls.

We never should have yielded to all the entreaties of Christ's servants, nor accepted the most urgent invitations, had it not been for the inward quickening, enlightening, and teaching of the loving Spirit of Christ; but just as Elisha was drawn from the plow by Elijah casting his mantle over him; as the disciples were drawn from their nets and ship and father, by a word from Christ, "Follow me;" and as Saul was drawn forever from his persecuting by a sight of "that Just One" whose brethren he was injuring,—so were we drawn "with cords of a man and with bands of love," from self, sin, the world, and everything beneath the sun, to gaze on the ascended Lamb on the Father's throne. And it is not unintelligent; for although He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3); yet this is explained by Jesus thus: "It is written in the prophets, and they will be all taught of God; every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh, unto me" (John 6:45). "But you hath he quickened who were dead," for only the living can be drawn so as to run after Him; a corpse is not drawn but lifted.

We have all seen the wary babe, just beginning to walk, drawn towards a smiling parent holding out his arms to it; and when drawn, by even the help of a finger, how quickly it runs into the parent's embrace! So does the "newborn babe in Christ" run to Him when drawn and helped

by the gracious motions of His Spirit, and the teaching that shows His love. And surely we must all feel how helpless we are to take any journey Christ-ward, and that we need constantly to be moved and drawn by His Spirit. “Draw me” implies a feeling of need, a sense of distance, a longing for more intimate communion, a conviction of spiritual inability, a dissatisfaction with the present condition, and a confidence in “Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh, in us” (Eph. 3: 20). And O how blessed the man who waits upon the Lord, and, in utter helplessness, says, “Draw me,” and receives the answer in sweet drawings of soul to enjoy nearer fellowship with the divine Bridegroom! It is at such hallowed seasons we are assured of our being acceptable to Him, and we feel as if we heard Him say to us, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). And, surely, there is no magnet for drawing the heart of the Bride like that of the Bridegroom’s manifested and revealed love!

“We will run after Thee.” —As those precious perfumes or excellences of character were the cause of attraction or love, the first words of this verse are a prayer that He would unfold His loveliness, and thereby draw the soul to Himself. The character of Christ, as opened to the heart by the Holy Ghost, is the corrective of our natural sluggishness, and kindles within us the desire of following Him with all our energy—of running after Him; but as our weakness is more sensibly felt as this desire strengthens, we pray that His strength may be made perfect in our weakness, and we may be constrained by the influence of His grace— “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Nothing is more attractive than a lovely character to those capable of relishing its beauties. The Creator has made us susceptible of this attraction, as naturally as matter is attracted by gravitation; and when the Holy Ghost unfolds the loveliness of Christ, and restores the perceptive powers of the heart, we are spontaneously drawn towards Him.1 When He who has displayed His love in a holy devotedness to God on earth and in dying for our sins, becomes, by grace, our one object, then it is our delight to be near Him, in the consciousness of our souls, and we run after Him, as the needle of the compass turns naturally towards the pole.

As a bride runs towards her bridegroom the moment he shows himself, and needs no drawing but his presence, so is it with the gracious soul and the heavenly Bridegroom.

The request was “Draw me,” but the promise is, “We will run after Thee.” “For as the body is one and hath many members, so also is the Christ; for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” And as we are one spirit with the. Lord, and one Spirit as well as one life is in us all, the loving and devoted activity of one—especially if he be a prominent “member” in “the body of Christ” —acts with sympathetic spiritual power upon all within the sphere of His influence. How deeply and widely the living embodiment of love and consecration to Christ in such men as Paul, Martyn, and M’Cheyne, has acted upon the Church of God! A life of love and near communion with the Lord Jesus stirs our souls, and engages us to run after Him as they ran. And no amount of learning, knowledge, gift, or ability will have lasting spiritual effect, unless baptized into personal love and devotedness to Christ. “My soul followeth hard after Thee,” must be the sentiment of our souls, if we would enjoy sweet and near fellowship with our Beloved, and be useful and spiritually influential in our several spheres.2

And it is “after Thee” we will run. Not after our own objects, interests, or ideas; but, like Paul, “I press towards the goal” —a glorified Christ—and am not to be drawn aside by any object, or rest satisfied with any attainment, until I reach Him, am like Him, and with Him in glory! How easy to be entangled in a yoke of bondage by running after even the best of men! What liberty when we follow Christ only! There is no leadership but, in Christ when they truth of God lies straight in our souls; and the truth is always more or less perverted where you have men drawing away disciples after them. When John pointed straight to Jesus, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God,” immediately two of his disciples who heard John speak left him, though the greatest of woman-born, and followed Jesus. So will it always be, if we take only the place of “the friend of the Bridegroom,” and not that of the Bridegroom himself. Our mission, as the ministers of Christ, is to introduce souls to HIM, and leave them with HIM, and not to form an admiring circle of disciples around ourselves.3

There are some notable examples of drawing and running in Scripture. We read of Elijah: “He found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was plowing, and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah.”

And no sooner is Jesus anointed as our Prophet, than He casts “His mantle” on the fishermen by the sea of Galilee, and said, “Follow me and they straightway left their nets and followed Him.” And one of those very men, Simon Peter, after the Lord’s resurrection, when He appeared on the shore of that sea and gave the miraculous draft of fishes, as soon as John said to him, “It is the Lord!” his love was so impatient to be at His feet, that he could not bear to abide the slow progress of the ship, but he “cast himself into the sea,” and hastened to his risen Lord.

And when “this same Jesus” appeared to Saul, be adds, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision;” and in another place he says, when God’s Son was revealed in him, “immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:” and when speaking of the way in which the gospel was introduced into Europe, he says, on recounting the various drawings of the Lord by His Spirit, “Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had sent us to preach the gospel unto them.” This was service: but in communion we find him, as in the third of Philippians, saying, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark,” that I may know Him, win Him, be like Him, and with Him forever in glory.

And when the Lord returns, what a running there will be to meet Him! The dead saints shall be raised in spiritual bodies, the living saints changed, and the center of attraction will be the descending Saviour, and they shall together be caught up to meet the Lord in the air: and when He shall come in glory to the earth, and reveal Himself to His Israel as their Messiah, Jehovah’s “Leader and Commander to the people,” then “nations shall run” to where He is in the earthly Jerusalem, for then shall He “sit upon the throne of His father David;” and of His nation it is said, “Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel: for He hath glorified thee” (Isa. 60:5). “And He shall judge among the nations: neither shall they learn war any more.”

“He is our Peace” —the world’s “Prince of Peace:” but until the day of His appearing we are called to follow Him through conflict, rejection, afflictions, trials, sorrows: for as our Forerunner “He hath left us an example that we should follow His steps:” for when “He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” And Paul would run unto Him, even were it through crucifixion and death (Philip. 3:10, 11). Our race is to be run all through the wilderness, the eye of a reposing faith “looking unto Jesus” as the obedient Man, who began, continued, and ended. His course in faith, “and is now set down on the right hand of the throne of God:” He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny Himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

2. “THE KING HATH BROUGHT ME INTO HIS CHAMBERS.” —The Beloved is a Priest in verse 3; He is here “the King.” The composer of “the Song” seemed very much like a King-Priest at the dedication of the Temple. These, however, were chambers into which he could not introduce his Bride, although he might introduce her into his palaces, and show her the fruit of his wisdom and the royal magnificence of his throne. But our Beloved, who, as the Royal Priest, is already crowned with glory and honor, can introduce us into every chamber of His house, and show us all His treasures, and also at last receive us to Himself, and make us free of the many mansions in the Father’s house—the palace and throne in the heavenly city—and the regal glory over the millennial earth.

And how full of blessing to be drawn now in sweet fellowship into the chambers of our Beloved, and be able to say, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 John, 1-3). And this seems to come so suddenly, that while we are yet speaking, the Lord answers our prayer, and “The King hath brought me into His chambers!” is our joyful experience.

It is only the Bride that has “liberty and access” to enter “the secret place” of holy fellowship. At Windsor strangers are allowed to pass freely through the staterooms, and gaze on all their furniture, garniture, and objects of historic interest; but the sovereign’s “chambers” can be entered only by the Queen’s children, members of the royal household, or such as are specially invited; so is it with the “chambers” of our heavenly Bridegroom. There are many rooms in “the King’s palace” —outward Christian privileges, such as are common to all alike—into which strangers as well as children may enter; but into the chambers of secret spiritual knowledge, experience, and fellowship, none but such as are brought by the Holy Ghost can enter. Jesus was wont to take His disciples into His chambers when He was on earth, as when He said, “Come ye yourselves into a desert place and rest awhile;” or when, in Matt. 13, He “sent the multitude away and went into the house,” declared unto them the parable of the tares of the field, and opened up to them also the inner mysteries of the kingdom, given under the parabolic symbols of the pearl, the treasure, and the drag net with the good fishes gathered into vessels; or when He took them into the upper room, instituted the Lord’s Supper, washed their feet, and opened up to them the blessings consequent on the coming of the abiding Comforter, and gave that wondrous specimen of His love unto the end, which we have in His intercessory prayer. It was in these chambers He revealed more of the Father, and spoke more of Him than at any time.4 “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” This is the great foundation truth of the Church, the specialty of our calling and position in Christ; and when known and enjoyed in the Spirit we are brought into His chambers by the Holy Ghost, and there enabled to see the “riches of His grace” and the God-ward side of divine things, which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart, of the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him: but God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit.”

The very books of the Bible might be regarded as so many chambers of the King, into which He brings His Bride, and shows her endless diversities of glories. There are galleries of pictures of grace, and galaxies of personal, moral, official, and displayed glories in connection with the Beloved Himself, and also in connection with His saints. There are personal and moral glories of the Head of the Church displayed in the gospels, and chambers full of the mysteries of God, the purposes, operations, affections, and ways of God in the epistles. What a sight is it to enter into such a chamber as the Roman Epistle, and see how the gospel of God in connection with His Son determined in power as such, by resurrection, becomes “power of God unto salvation” to men who have been living in sin; or to enter into the Ephesian chamber, and see God, “rich in mercy,” displaying His everlasting love in quickening “dead” sinners, uniting them to His risen Son, their glorified Head, as set over all things, and they blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him: to see, as on Pentecost, the Holy Ghost descend and baptize the waiting disciples into one body, connected with Christ their living Head in heaven, making them one Spirit with the Lord, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all: the house of God: an habitation of God in the Spirit: the Body of Christ, the Bride of the Lamb, for whom He gave Himself that she might be quickened, raised, and seated in Him in heavenly places now, and be actually glorified together by-and-by; the display of the kindness and love of and the exceeding riches of His grace in the ages to come; and coming forth with Him in His glory to reign in love, life, and endless blessing; when He shall have all things put under Him, both the heavenly and the earthly, and enjoy His love, confidence, and fellowship forever. Ah, beloved! it is only the blessed one who lives “in the secret place” of the Lord who is entrusted with the Lord’s secrets. Noah knew His grace for himself, and His counsel about the flood, which none of the “giants in those days” knew. Abraham was in communion with God on the hill top, and knew the secret of the come-down God about Sodom’s destruction, which even righteous Lot living there knew not until the very last Moment!

3. THE GLADNESS. — “WE WILL BE GLAD AND REJOICE IN THEE.” When we are drawn “by cords of a man and bands of love” (Hos. 11:4) into the king’s “chambers,” in which He treats us as His most intimate friends, reveals to us the secrets of His heart, unfolds to us His fullness of grace, wisdom, power, and glory, and gives us to have communion with Himself, as our glorified Lord, the thoughts that fill our minds, and the affections that pervade our hearts, are those of gladness and joy; and we naturally express ourselves like the spouse here— “We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.”

When others are seeking many things, we can say— “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:5). If we have one thing before us, one desire in us, then there must be joy and gladness. Too many say, “One thing I have desired,” without being able to add, “that will I seek after.” Here we have the seeking after it expressed in the “draw me, we will run after thee.”

The joy here expressed is the joy of sweet and near communion. “In Thy presence is fullness of joy.” “These things write I unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4): and they were all about Christ, the manifested Life and Love. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” The essence of the Kingdom of God, as found by us now, is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” The Holy Ghost is the element in which we live and move and have our spiritual being; the very atmosphere in which we breathe—for we are “in the Spirit,” and “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is in us as “the Spirit of love and of power, and of a sound mind;” and when Christ is revealed to us in all His preciousness, loveliness, fullness, and beauty, then we have “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

It is by divine discoveries of the excellency of Christ Himself and of His work, grace, and glory, that our souls are so engaged, occupied, and filled with inward gladness that our face will shine, and we will not be able to contain our sense of the exquisite joy, but we will be certain to let it be known by our exulting demeanor and manifest rejoicing.

Nothing earthly can give us such joy. It is far greater than that of the men of the world when their corn and wine abound. “We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.” “My joy shall remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15.)

He gives the “oil of joy for mourning.” How blessed, when, through Christ we see that we have such a justification—such a standing in grace and freedom from wrath, death, and every evil, that we can rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for then “we joy in God.” We find Him the justifier, the Saviour-God, and our exulting thought is— “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” “Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”

When in “His chambers,” “rejoice in the Lord always,” is an easy duty—yea, rather a high privilege. Oh, to know more of the joy of being in His presence, abiding in Him, and having living, loving spiritual communion! Then, come what may, we will be able to rejoice, for we know that all things shall work together for good to us; and He will hide us in His pavilion “in the time of trouble,” “in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me.” And when rejected and despised of men, like Jesus, we can rejoice in spirit, for not only are our names written in heaven, but we ourselves are “seated in Him in heavenly places;” and as He could say, “All things are delivered unto Me of my Father,” etc., so can we say, “All things are ours, for we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s;” and so, although “sorrowing” and “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” “yet always rejoicing” is our portion.

When Jesus was taken up from His disciples, it was when with uplifted hands He blessed them, and as “He was carried up into heaven,” they felt so associated with Him under His blessing, that “they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:52). And when they were endued with power from on high—the Holy Ghost coming upon them—they “did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.” The King had truly brought them into His chambers, and their feeling was— “We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.” And when persecuted for Jesus’ name’s sake, they remembered Jesus’ words, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad,” for “they went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). And surely Stephen, “a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,” was in the King’s chamber when his enemies “saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel,” when he began his address with “the God of glory,” and finished by seeing “the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,” saying— “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God;” and was taken as to his spirit into the opened chamber of the heavenly glory, with the glorified Man Christ Jesus. And as the testimony of Jesus was given, it brought joy to all who embraced it, as in the case of the Ethiopian, who “went on his way rejoicing;” and whatever the circumstances, “the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:52). And the apostle Paul, when he had nearly finished his course, and was the prisoner of Jesus Christ, though in bonds and imprisonment was brought into the King’s chambers, for in Philippians, he seems “filled with all joy and peace.” His writing there is more experimental than in any of his epistles, and throughout it is sparkling and radiant with joy in the Lord.

“In Thee” is the grand secret of joy. If we count on saints, service, circumstances, privileges, we will be grievously disappointed; but not if our joy is in Christ, for He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.”

Let the maiden of humble origin be brought by another into the palace of a great prince to whom she is betrothed, and be shown all his riches, treasures, and glory, she would certainly feel it to be a high gratification to have such treasures as her portion by-and-by; but let the prince himself come for her, and take her to himself, and bring her into his own most private apartments as his own loved bride, then she would not think so much of her dignity, wealth, and splendor, as of him who had established the endearing relationship which made him her own beloved, and because of whom all was hers, only because she was his. So is it with us. “We will be glad and rejoice in thee.” “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath, covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels” (Isa. 61:10). It is not in the heaven before us we rejoice, not in the crown, the palm, the glory, but the Bridegroom of our hearts is there—there is someone to go to, for heaven is heaven because CHRIST is there; and when truly brought into spiritual fellowship with Him, and our relationship to Him is realized, our hearts exult in Him alone, for—

4. THE CELEBRATION OF HIS LOVE. — “WE WILL REMEMBER THY LOVE MORE THAN WINE.” — “Unlike the pleasures of the world, these gratifications are attended with no painful remembrances ‘We will remember Thy Love more than wine; Here, with Jesus, we have great peace in present possession, glorious hopes for the future, sweet recollections of the past. What are the remembrances continually gathering round an irreligious life? Hopes blasted, expectations disappointed, a sense of having never realized what was anticipated from any source, the enfeebling effects of dissipation, apprehensiveness of detection and exposure in unrighteous gratifications, and forebodings uttered by conscience of judgment to come; these are the best fruits that memory can gather from the past, wherein there have been no visions of Jesus. How empty is the recollection of even the temperate and allowable enjoyments of the irreligious! But how sweet is the remembrance of God’s grace! These memories are as a luminous stream of living waters winding amid the deepening gloom and ruins of the past. How tender the recollection of the times and places where first this precious Friend met us with the assurance of forgiveness, where His Spirit melted down the soul in deep contrition, where we had brightening views of heaven, where Jesus showed us the riches of His grace, the pledges of His glory, and gave us His love! Could any pleasures of wine, of sense, of the world, be remembered as fondly as the disciples cherished the recollection of the farewell words of their Lord, of the discourse on the road to Emmaus, of the scene at the transfiguration? And as the tide of time will not allow us to make tabernacles and dwell where thus our Lord met us, memory delights to build her shrines there, and linger fondly on those consecrated hills.”

Memory as our storehouse contains many happy reminiscences of the loving-kindness of the Lord. The word is “loves,” as showing the fullness of His love to us—that love which has been manifested in His sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension—in His sending the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the unction, seal, earnest, witness, and teacher, imparting all the benefits, gifts, graces, and joys, which so fill our souls with inward gladness, that we rejoice before Him in holy worship, and shoe forth His praises in devoted service. When we are filled with a sense of His love, we know experimentally the naturalness of the sequence, “Behold, God is my salvation;” “draw water with joy out of wells of salvation;” and “praise the Lord: call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted” (Isa. 12:2-4).

When we gather to the name of Jesus and break the bread and drink the wine “on the first day of the week,” it is for a visible memorial of Him, a remembrance and celebration of His love, such as is pleasing to Him and refreshing to ourselves, for it is a “publishing of His death until He come,” and by that death we have got to know something of the extent of His love, for “He loved the Church, and gave Himself for

it.” “We will remember Thy love.” Oh, how could we ever forget it? But ah! we know in our sad experience that it is not so constantly the subject of our meditation as it ought to be, and that we cannot often say, “My heart is bubbling up a good matter. I speak the things that I have made concerning the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” If it were so, our cup of enjoyment in communion would run over, and we would rehearse His love, and make mention of it to others, with such a zest that they would be infected with the like passionate affection, and would join us in worshipping gladness, in praising and extolling Him in whom an excellency resides. He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God; and surely it becomes us “by Him to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, giving thanks unto His name” (Heb. 13:15).

“We will remember Thy love more than wine” —more than the world remember their choicest delights. Says one, truly, “When we let our affections run out upon the creature we do but lose them, and they become unprofitable to us; but when they are set upon Christ, we lose them not; He makes them heavenly and gracious, and gives them to us again. Whatsoever of love we expend on Christ, in Christ we shall find it again.”

The only way to have our hearts transfigured is to leave them with Him on the holy mount of self-sacrificing love; “for the love of Christ constraineth us; we love Him because He first loved us.”

What a relief in the midst of the apostasy and confusion of the present to know that although the Church, as the house of God, is gone, “the body of Christ” (of Eph. 1) continues; although the candlestick (of Rev. 1) be removed, and the outward witness of Christendom be spued out of the mouth of the faithful and true Witness, as in the early part of “the Revelation,” the real saints of God come out towards the end, as the “Bride, the Lamb’s wife,” presented to himself all-glorious in the Father’s house, the joy and gladness of that blessed day being the joy of a marriage feast.

5. THE LOVE OF UPRIGHTNESS. — “The upright love Thee!” Sincerity is of the greatest importance in Christians. “The upright:” who are they? The first man characterized as upright is Noah: “Noah was a just man, upright in his generations—Noah walked with God.” This is contrasted with the state of the world in his day. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

The root idea of “upright” is straightness, as opposed to crookedness, as when Joseph said, “My sheaf arose and also stood upright;” or in Jeremiah, “upright as the palm tree,” that shoots up its straight trunk from the well’s side.

The moral idea is inward rectitude and sincerity, without guile, double-mindedness, or false-heartedness. Achish said to David, “Thou hast been upright. . . for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day.” “God hath made man upright,” with no crookedness in but perfectly straight in his entire nature, physical, mental, and moral.

Man’s present crooked condition is seen in the description given of the woman (Luke 13), “who was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.” And the means by which crooked humanity is made “upright,” are seen in what Christ said and did to her: “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity; and He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” Only straight people either glorify God, or love the Lord Jesus Christ: “The upright love Thee.”

The literal rendering is, “Straightnesses love Thee,” the abstract being put for the concrete.

But there must surely be in the saints a universal uprightness—everything lying straight within us —sincerity and truth running straight through the thoughts, feelings, conscience, affections, words, and ways, and the whole man pervaded by the atmosphere of moral honesty—if there is to be all-absorbing love to Christ; and there can be no doubt that the little devotedness shown by professing Christians generally is an indication (according to Christ’s standard, Luke 8) of little love to Christ; and that tells again its sad tale of the great want of “a good conscience,” sincerity, and uprightness,—of “truth in the inward parts.”

When “Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” His astonishment is excited, “Whence knowest thou me?” And when Jesus shows Himself to be the Jehovah-Messias by telling him, “When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee,” he confesses Him at once as “the Son of God and King of Israel.” It is as if the words of the 139th Psalm had flashed into his mind: “O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off;” and as if he were living habitually under the omniscient eye of Jehovah; and that, as a consequence, he discerned in Jesus “the Son of God,” by His saying, “I saw thee.” Thus we obtain a good illustration of guilelessness and sincerity. The upright Nathanael at once recognizes the dignity of the Messias, and confesses Him as the Son of God and King of Israel. He is all “truth in the inward parts,” living in a state of uprightness with God; and when the Divine One, who was revealed “full of grace and truth,” is before him, he confesses Him, and bows himself as a worshipper.

And whoever can realize and sit under the shade of the 139th Psalm is an upright one “in whom there is no guile.” What a sense there is in that psalm of the eye of God following us everywhere! And when it comes to be a question whether David is upright with God in really taking sides with Him against His enemies, he is so conscious of integrity that he can say about this matter, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

And if we come to the case of fallen Peter, in his interviews with the risen Lord Jesus, we will have another sample of sincerity in love. “That his faith had not failed he is enabled to give sweet proof, for as soon as he hears that it is his Lord who is standing on the shore, he threw himself into the water to reach Him, not, however, as a penitent, as though he had not already wept, but as one who could trust himself in His presence—the presence of his once-denied Master—in full assurance of heart.” And when our Lord put to him the thrice-repeated question, “Lovest thou me?” it drew forth the uprightness of his love, for, like the psalmist, he could refer his sincerity of heart to the divine omniscience, “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” There is in this state of soul a fine specimen o the divine workmanship. How happy for us to know the sincerity of love evinced by the restored apostle!

Before this, the risen One had appeared to Mary at the sepulcher, whose love made her linger there after the disciples had left; and the sincerity of that love, that would have her Lord dead or alive—though very ignorant, knowing Him as yet only “after the flesh” (as did also the disciples) not as “the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit” —was very pleasing to the Lord, and He sent her with the important message that, as risen, He now associated His disciples with Himself in resurrection as His brethren. Like another woman, who washed His feet with her tears, she “loved much,” she loved uprightly; there was no object between her and her Lord; and immediately that “Jesus saith unto her, Mary, she turned herself and saith unto Him, Rabboni,” for her heart turned to Him as the needle of the compass turns to the pole!

The apostle Paul is, perhaps, the brightest illustration of sincerity of love to Christ. And this is seen in many ways. It was seen in his own devotedness, his personal labors to preach Christ, his determination to keep His gospel uncorrupted and His Church pure, His flock tended and undistracted, and to have His glory advanced. Even an apostle must be withstood to the face if he would give any countenance by double-dealing and dissimulation to the overlaying of the faith of Christ by the ordinances of a superseded dispensation; and no quarter was to be given to those who would undermine that faith by the teachings of a Gentile philosophy. Where does he write, “The love of Christ constraineth us,” but in that epistle wherein he writes, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, we have had our conversation in the world. For we are not as many who corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ: but we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” This was written to that church to which he had previously written, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.”

We read of “the disciple whom Jesus loved;” and such an one could say “We love Him because He first loved us.” And it is instructive to consider the steps by which he advances to this precious experience. “God is love; in this was manifested the love of God,” and then he goes on to tell of His being sent into the world, “that we might live through Him,”— “the propitiation for our sins;” “we dwell in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit;” and love with us is perfected, “that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is so are we in this world;” and such “perfect love” as has been thus “manifested” in the Son, beginning with giving us life “when we were dead in sins,” and completing the circle of its sincerity and devotedness to our interests in identifying us with the manifested Son, in risen life, love, victory, and glory, at the throne of God, gives boldness in the day of judgment, links our interests and prospects with His, and also enables us to say, “We love Him, because He first loved us.”

And when this glorious One appears to His exiled apostle, as in the beginning of the Book of the Revelation, and he falls at His feet as dead, we read that “He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not;” and the hand of Him who has all power of life in Himself, and “all power in heaven and in earth” given unto Him being upon him, “the power of Christ so rested upon him” that he could stand before His glory, and never had aught but “boldness,” though the whole action of the book is one of judgment, and its day “the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” And the sincerity and uprightness of his love is seen in every page—in his being interested in every scene, not because it was all about Him, but because it was so intimately bound up with Christ’s glory, and not immediately relating to his standing, circumstances, or blessing. “The upright love Thee,” was never better illustrated than when this loving disciple “wept much because no man was found able to open the book” of the title-deeds of the earth, so as to rescue the inheritance of his glorified Lord out of the hands of the Usurper and Destroyer!

The growth, unselfishness, and uprightness of Christians’ love, can be measured by the proportion in which we can interest ourselves in the things of Christ that do not immediately affect ourselves. The disciple who can read the book of the Apocalypse with “unto Him that loveth us” sounding through his soul, and yet feel a similar interest to that felt by the apostle in every vision and action it contains, is the one who can truly say, “The upright love Thee.”

When we were young Christians we searched the Word with nothing else but the one thought before our minds of finding what would suit and profit us; but now we can read it without a thought of ourselves, or of our own salvation, and only to have more intelligence in the things of Christ, for “the things concerning Himself” are now our engrossing topics, and we are more associated in spirit with those of whom it is said, they “fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints,” and who “sung a new song, saying, THOU art worthy;” or the angels “ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands,” who are saying continually and without one thought of themselves, “Worthy is the Lamb that is slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”

We are reminded of a fine Old Testament illustration of exclusive love, and love in its sincerity, in the case of those multitudes that came up to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel. It seems like a foreshadow of this coming scene of joy and praise of which we have just been writing. There were “the Gadites who had separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness,” who showed their sincerity by being his when he had nothing to give them but himself and rejection, outlawry, and persecution. The consequence was, they had faces like lions—for “the righteous is bold as a lion” —and “were as swift as roes upon the mountains.” Having one object gives lion—like boldness; the single eye produces “a true heart;” and we will dare anything for our Beloved; as these Gadites “went over Jordan when it had overflown all its banks, and they put to flight all them of the valley,” so when we “know no man after the flesh” —not even Christ, but are attached to Him on the basis of resurrection—as “over Jordan” —we will show the sincerity of our love by occupying ourselves in aggressive work “for His name.” But not to mention all, we note that it must have evinced sincerity of love in “the mighty men,” even of Saul’s brethren of Benjamin, to come to David to Ziklag, “when he kept himself close because of Saul;” and perhaps they were more actuated by sincerity than the three thousand “of the kindred of Saul,” who came to Hebron, who “hitherto the greatest part of them had kept the house of Saul;” for they came only after the sun of Saul’s house was setting and David’s throne was now being bathed in the orient radiance of morning glory. But we have a notable word said about the fifty thousand of Zebulun, that they “could keep rank, and were not of double heart,” or as the margin has it, “without a heart and a heart.” “All these men of war that could keep rank came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel, and all the rest of Israel were of one heart to make David king, and there they were with David three days eating and drinking,” and “there was joy in Israel.” There was one heart, one object, one great feasting company, and one great national joy. And we may be very sure that there will be always unity produced in the Church, a spiritual festival, and a universal joy, when the one object of owning and honoring Christ as our common Lord is the one supreme object before us all; and it will always be found that absorbing engrossment with the perfect object God presents to us, ensures uprightness and produces “a perfect heart,” and “the upright love Thee.” “We love Him because He first

loved us.” “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor. 16:22).

Song of Songs, Lecture 2: The Fragrant Name (1:3)

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS: the man anointed by God with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed with the devil (for God was with Him), is before us, as we read, “Because of the savor of Thy good ointments, Thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love Thee” (verse 3).

Here we have these three things:—1. THE GOOD OINTMENT; 2. THE FRAGRANT NAME; and 3. THE VIRGIN-LOVE.

1. THE OINTMENTS. —The perfumes of our Lord Jesus are rich in fragrance. His name is perfume poured forth; and those who know His love, and love Him above all things, are ever ready to tell out their appreciation of His name and affection for Him, and also to give it body and shape in deeds of self-sacrificing devotedness.

It was customary among Orientals to use rich and costly fragrant oils for health and beauty, and on public occasions, such as feasts and marriages, as well as for daily use as among ourselves. Says a modern author:

“The custom of anointing the body is usual in hot climates. Even the Greeks, Romans, and others, whose limbs were mostly protected by clothes from the dryness of the air, found the advantage of its use. In going to entertainments it is probable that, like the Greeks, the Egyptians anointed themselves before they left home; but still it was customary for a servant to attend every guest as he seated himself, and to anoint his head, and this was one of the principal tokens of welcome. The ointment was contained sometimes in an alabaster, sometimes in an elegant porcelain vase; and so strong was the odor, and so perfectly were the different component substances amalgamated, that some of this ancient ointment in one of the alabaster vases in the museum of Alnwick Castle yet retains its scent, though between two and three thousand years old.”1

Whatever we may think of the likelihood of this, it conveys to us the beautiful truth that the good ointments of our Anointed One are still as delicious in their fragrance after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, as when the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descended upon Him, and the Father testified from the opened heaven to His well-pleased-ness in Him; and the savor of His good ointments will perfume the Father’s house of many mansions, the throne of God and the Lamb in the heavenly city, and cause the nations to rejoice throughout the redeemed earth in the days when the heavens shall rule, and when the whole earth shall be filled with His glory.

In order to typify the coming anointing of the Holy Ghost and the graces of the Spirit, the Lord instructed Moses to make “an holy anointing oil,” as we read in Exodus 30:23-38: “Take thou unto thee principal spices,... and thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compounded after the art of the perfumer; it shall be was carried on may be inferred from Seneca, Epist. 86, who says that people anointed themselves twice or even three times a day, in order that the delicious fragrance might never diminish. The wealthy Greeks and Romans carried their ointments and perfumes with them, in small boxes of costly materials and beautiful workmanship. “— an holy anointing oil.” With this fragrant oil the tabernacle with all its furniture was anointed, as well as Aaron and his sons, who set forth Christ and the Church. This holy anointing oil was to be exclusively kept for the sanctuary of God. It was not to be put upon man’s flesh, nor on a stranger, but it was to be put before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where, said Jehovah, “I will meet with thee: it shall be to you most holy. And as for the perfume that thou shalt make, ye shall not make unto yourselves according to the composition thereof; it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. Whosoever shall make like unto that to smell thereto shall even be cut off from his people.”

When Jesus was conceived it was by the Holy Ghost. By the same Spirit He was visibly anointed at His baptism, just as Aaron was anointed without blood (Exod. 29:7); but in order that we might have the anointing of the Spirit, Jesus offered Himself by the eternal Spirit a sacrifice unto God for our redemption—as Aaron’s sons were first sprinkled with blood, and then anointed with the holy anointing oil. “Thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him” (Exod. 29:20, 21). It was because of His own perfection that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost when here; but it is also because of His accomplished work in obedience unto death on Calvary that He has been crowned with glory and honor, as our anointed Aaron, and “like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard—Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garents,”—so “This Jesus... being by the right hand of God exalted” —and “anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows,” “and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear;” the “precious oil” on the head of Christ has flowed down to the skirts of His garments, and the saints and He are thereby formed into one body—though as in all things, so in being head, He has the pre-eminence.

In Christ Jesus, when on earth, we see the lowly, self-humbled man, formed as to His humanity by and filled with the Holy Ghost, by whom the, divine perfection of His character was developed and all His graces were rendered fragrant. As the vessel of “grace and truth” He was filled with the Holy Ghost, and He was the perfection of manhood to God, and “altogether lovely” in the eyes of such as had the “anointing which teacheth all things,” to discover the engaging perfections of His attractive character. As one has well said— “There was no unevenness in Jesus; there was nothing salient in His character, because all was in perfect subjection to God in His humanity, and had its place, and did exactly its service, and then disappeared. God was glorified in it, and all was in harmony. The hand that struck the chord found all in tune: all answered to the mind of Him whose thoughts of grace and holiness, of goodness yet of judgment of evil, whose fullness of blessing in goodness were sounds of sweetness to every weary ear, and found in Christ their only expression. Every element, every faculty in His humanity, responded to the impulse which the divine will gave to it, and then ceased in a tranquility in which self had no place.” “The savor of Thy ointments is good.”

Christ’s graces were always emitting a delicious fragrance, and all went up in a sweet savor to God like the fragrance of the frankincense that was offered with the meat-offering in the Jewish tabernacle. The perfume of the life of Jesus was unique —the holy anointing oil of the sanctuary, which was peculiarly His own; for God anointed Him with the Holy Ghost—God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Him. “All thy

garments smell of aloes and myrrh and cassia out of the ivory palaces." "Garments" symbolize character and outward conduct. In all Christ spoke, taught, did, or suffered, there was the perfume of the "holy anointing oil." He was indeed the Christ—the Anointed—the Messiah promised. He was "conceived of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:20); at His baptism John "saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16, 17); He could say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me" (Luke 4:18); He was "by the right hand of God exalted, and received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost;" and being anointed in the upper sanctuary as a King-priest "with the oil of gladness," after His work on earth to glorify the Father had been finished, the anointing has descended upon all the members of His body, and He hath thereby made us "kings and priests unto God and His Father;" and this is "the unction from the Holy One," Christ exalted, "which teacheth us all things," is the "seal" of accomplished redemption, and the "earnest" of promised glory.

And that we who have Christ as our life, the Spirit as our unction, the things above as our portion, and the Word of Christ as our directory, may be a sweet savor of Christ in our daily life, we are enjoined to array ourselves in the perfumed "garments" of the "royal priesthood," with Christ "all and in all." "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye; and above all these things put on LOVE, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful:" and that it may be felt by all around you that you have shared with Christ when "anointed with the oil of gladness," "let the Word of CHRIST dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord; and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto GOD and the FATHER by HIM" (Col. 3:12-17).

And as the vessels of the tabernacle were anointed with the "holy anointing oil," so those who are "vessels of mercy" are fitted by the Spirit's unction "for the Master's use;" and we are also enabled, as a holy priesthood, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

It is a sure sign of advancement in the divine life when we become enamored of and engrossed with the person of Christ, and love to trace the lowly steps of Him "who, in the days of His flesh," was the obedient Son of God and a stranger here; and all His human life was characterized by being the Vessel of all those gracious qualities that made Him the One on whom the Father's eye could rest, and in whom He could delight. All fullness dwelt in Him personally: fullness of "grace and truth" —light, life, and love; "and out of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" —grace in us by the Holy Ghost answering to grace in Him by the same Spirit; for the germ of every grace in Christ is in all Christians, hence our responsibility to be "the epistle of Christ." He is the corn of wheat that has fallen into the ground and died, and now produceth the much fruit in us who believe, being possessed of the like qualities "in newness of life;" as the yellow harvest is the same in kind as the seed-corn from which it has sprung, grown, and ripened.

And as ointment having a good savor bespeaks its own presence, so Christ's face shone with the heavenly anointing, and he could not be hid; for grace having been poured into His lips, "all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth;" and as the "oil and wine" of the good Samaritan, "virtue went out of Him and healed them all." And as fragrant oils were pleasing and refreshing at feasts, so pleasing are the graces of Christ to the soul admitted to the banquet of His love, for then truly His "ointment and perfume rejoice the heart" (Prov. 27:9). Such fragrant ointments were refreshing to Christ himself: "I do always the things which please Him; I delight to do Thy will, O my God! Thy law is within my heart. I thank Thee, O Father; even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work I have glorified Thee upon the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." And as the savor of His good ointments—His meekness, lowliness, self-sacrifice, loving obedience, and devotedness—reaches us, we are "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" for "the friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth, greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." His "ointment and perfume rejoice the heart:" for "such an High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners... the Son consecrated forever more; anointed with the oil of gladness, crowned with glory and honor, and set down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

"Now, from what hath been said it is evident that these precious ointments here mentioned were but types and shadows of Christ's graces. Firstly, As they were in Himself; secondly, As they are conveyed and manifested in His members; and thirdly, As they are denied to unbelievers (Rom. 8:9). All which do show of what a redolent savor, and of what odoriferous sweetness, all the anointings of God are in JESUS CHRIST."2

2. THE NAME. — "Thy name is as ointment poured forth." The soul that knows Him as its Saviour is caught at once by the savor of His good ointments whenever there is the faintest whisper of His precious Name.

The name in Scripture is given as expressive of some quality in the person, and to signalize some blessing granted or work accomplished. Jacob was called Israel, because as a Prince he had power with God; and Simon was called Cephas or Peter in anticipation of his connection with the confession of the Son of God as the Rock on which the Church was to be built; and so we find the Holy Ghost giving the Messiah—the Christ—the name of JESUS, "because He shall save His people from their sins." The Jehovah-Saviour, long promised, has come, and has been presented as the Messiah, which is by interpretation the Christ—the Anointed One; and it is remarkable how richly the odor of His Name is diffused in even one chapter—the first of the Gospel by John. He is introduced as the Word who was in the beginning with God, and was God, by whom all things were made; and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The glory of the only begotten of the Father is the glory of grace and truth: for as the Light He made all manifest; and as the Love He met in grace all the need the light revealed. His name, as the Son of the Father in the fullness of grace, is like ointment poured forth all through the Gospel; and "the Lamb of God" pointed Him out, His name was as ointment poured forth, and the two disciples that heard John speak followed Jesus. Then spread the fragrance of His name, and they said, "We have found the Messias, which is being interpreted the Christ." "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth." And when the guileless Nathanael saw him and heard His voice, he said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." And as He, the stranger-Son of God, moves from scene to scene in this Gospel, and meets sinner after sinner alone, and lets forth the fragrance of His good ointments, one after another confesses Him as the Son of God in the glory of His grace.

And Jesus' "name is as ointment poured forth." His name is Himself—His nature, graces, work, and glory. When Mary's fragrant ointment was poured on Him "the whole house was filled with the odor of the ointment" (Mark 14:3). When Jesus was moving from place to place full of grace and truth, and working in grace, He let forth the savor of His good ointment in deeds and words of love. "There went out a fame of Him" everywhere, and the needy multitudes came to Him from all sides, and testified He hath done all things well; for the sick were recovered; the diseased were healed; the deaf and dumb, the blind and lame, the palsied and dropsical, were made the subjects of His gracious power: and the devils were cast out, and the very dead heard the voice of the Son of God, and were made to own his gracious quickening energy. They were all astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with power. "And the fame of Him went out into every place."

But it is when we look to the cross that we can say with fullest intelligence, "Thy Name is as ointment poured forth," for it was there that He "poured out His life unto death," and He "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree;" it is there we perceive the love, because "He laid down His life for us," and "He offered Himself without spot unto God." There we perceive that "Christ hath loved us, and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savor" (Eph. 5:2). All He was in loving devotedness for the glory of God and our redemption, for establishing righteousness for the throne of God and peace for our consciences, was "poured forth" on Calvary; and as the preachers went from land to land spreading His gospel, and bearing His name before the Gentiles, and kings and children of Israel, they could say, "Now thanks be to God who causeth us always to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place" (2 Cor. 14). Were we able fully to tell out by the Holy Ghost all the excellences of His person; the perfection of His sacrificial work; His death, His resurrection, His ascension; His present life of loving intercessional and priestly service for us in heaven; His love, grace, and glory, that would make all who are capable of relishing the fragrance of His good ointments say with the Bride, "Thy name is as ointment poured forth."

And when His Name is fully preached, and "the gospel of the glory of Christ" is spiritually apprehended, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" shines in the heart, and we "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;" and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and "we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

"Because of the savor of Thy good ointments, Thy name is as an ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." "Thy name is as ointment poured forth." The savor of His ointment (as another writes with deep spiritual appreciation) is not confined to the Spouse herself; those associated with her share in its profusion. The attendant virgins are attracted and refreshed by the sweet odors of His name. Happy thought! It is not an ointment sealed up, but "poured forth." O what fellowship there is in the love of Jesus! Here pause a little, O my soul, and meditate on the fullness of THE NAME of Jesus "for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

What a center, what a source it is Around it the Church of God is gathered as its only center, by the quickening power and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

But, ere long, the heavens and the earth shall be united by its power and glory. The earthly Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with all the surrounding nations, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the innumerable company of angels—the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven shall be attracted to, and united by, that one, dear, uniting name. The Father hath purposed this wondrous glory for His Son; and it shall surely come to pass, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of time (the millennium) He might gather together in one (under one head) all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him" (Eph. 1:11). Then shall the fragrance of His name be wafted on every breeze, and all kindreds and tongues shall unite in that note of praise, "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is THY NAME in all the earth" (Psalm 8).

And when the thousand years of millennial blessing and glory shall have run their course, the heavens and the earth fled away, and the final judgment past, that NAME shall have lost none of its fragrance, power, and glory. It will then unite, in sweetest love, in holiest bonds, the many circles, the countless myriads of the new heavens and the new earth. The joy of every heart, the melody of every tongue, shall find their spring, power, motive, and object in Him. Every mountain of myrrh, and every hill of frankincense, shall owe their sweetness to His presence. And still His name shall be as ointment poured forth; yes, "poured forth," and "poured forth" forever. All his garments smelling of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, in the ivory palaces. And as age after age rolls on, the rich and varied graces of His love shall still be "poured forth" in infinite profusion, causing all hands and hearts and lips to drop with sweet-smelling myrrh, and filling every scene throughout the vast realms of the blest with the eternal fragrance of His name.3

3. THE VIRGIN-LOVE.— "Therefore virgins love thee." It is not the virgins: but virgins as such.4 The reason for the love is on account of all the excellences in His name—in Himself unfolded, communicated, and enjoyed.

Virgins who love Christ are such as have "oil in their vessels with their lamps," and have gone forth to meet the Bridegroom (Matt. 25); especially may such as are true to their proper calling be intended, who are glowing with fresh, warm, strong love to Him because of the savor of His good ointments—the knowledge of Himself and the realization of His dying love for them filling their souls with a responsive affection.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ."

Again, in Rev. 14:4, 5, "These are they that have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed unto God from among men—the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault."

The leading idea in both passages is chastity and purity. This, of course, is figurative, for, says Paul, "I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ;" and he adds, "another Jesus—another Spirit—another gospel." The virgin-believer is one who clings to Christ in holy love, is under subjection to His Spirit, and is not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God unto salvation; and is proof against the insidious, serpent-like undermining of the Christian faith which comes from the blandishments of personable men in the Church, whose links of connection with the world have never been cut, and who have succeeded in reducing the professing Church to its present sad state of lukewarmness and worldliness. The same

characteristic comes out in the godly remnant in Rev. 14, after the saints have been taken up to the throne of God (chap. 4:4). Their standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion tells of their association with Him in connection with God's intervention in grace, and His royal purposes for the glory of Jesus-Messiah; and when all the world will be wondering after the beast, receiving his mark and worshipping him, they will be standing with the Lamb, having His name and His Father's name in their foreheads. They will be openly and manifestly the Lamb's. They will learn the conquerors' song, the new song, and be seen walking in separation from all the idolatries that will then prevail, and in resolute adherence to Christ, notwithstanding the fiery ordeal through which they will have to pass. They will be pure, uncontaminated with Satanic pollution, guileless and faultless. They shall walk in their chaste virgin-Purity apart from the beast and his world, following "the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

And there may be more connection between the "virgins" of "the Song" and the "virgins" of the "Apocalypse" than most people think. However, for us there is this needful lesson: "therefore do the virgins love Thee;" for the "therefore" takes us back to supreme occupation with the Royal Bridegroom—His kiss, His love, the savor of His good ointments, and His name as ointment poured forth. The virgins in Revelation are seen associated in spirit with the royal purposes of God in grace, in connection with the exaltation of the suffering and rejected Messiah— "the Lamb:" and so Paul espouses his Corinthians "as a chaste virgin to Christ," when the subtlety of Satan was at work to draw them under the influence of "the god of this world," and corrupt the saints' minds from the simplicity that is in Christ; and it is only as we are standing with the Lamb—the Slain One—and are smelling the sweet savor of His good ointments, knowing his grace in humiliation, His dying love for us, beholding Him in heaven and in the full favor of God and we with Him, believing that He, the despised and rejected men, is yet to be manifested in kingly glory, that we shall retain in our souls our first love, and show our devotedness to Him, by following Him, an walking "as He also walked." Only supreme occupation with our Beloved, and seeing Him it His grace and glory, can preserve us from the wiles of the devil.

The deceivings of Satan are very manifold and subtle, and the children of God need to be specially watchful, lest they be drawn into worldly associations, wrong fellowships in service, or errors in doctrine, as well as grosser worldliness. O that our hearts, with virgin purity and simplicity of intelligent love, may be kept for our blessed Bridegroom alone, for—

Song of Songs, Lecture 1: The Bridegroom's Love (1:2)

THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS SOLOMON'S, is the title of this inspired Song of love; and the title is divine as well as the Song: and it is very expressive. Solomon wrote one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32), but this is "the Song of songs," so far as his compositions are concerned, though not perhaps pre-eminent above all that David his father or others wrote under the inspiration of the same Spirit. As "heaven of heavens" represents the highest heavens, so "Song of songs" means the pre-eminently excellent song.

And it is Solomon's, not David's: David was the conqueror; but Solomon, the king of righteousness and peace: and the Song represents to us the communion in love which we who believe have with our heavenly Bridegroom, now that He has fought, conquered, and been seated in peace on the throne of His Father as our Divine Solomon, "crowned with glory and honor." Christ is "our righteousness" and "our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

When we think of Solomon, we have one before us whom there has been none to equal among all the sons of men for greatness, wisdom, riches (1 Kings 4:12, 13), power, and glory (2 Chron. 9.), so that he is a fitting type of our glorious Bridegroom.

"A greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42); and He has sung a new song, a song of love and victory, when as the conqueror He rose from the dead and took His place in the midst of the great congregation as the leader of our praise; and we cannot but sing with Him, and of Him, and to Him, for "He shall bear the glory" forever.

The place which this "Song of songs" occupies is remarkable, coming, as it does, after Ecclesiastes, where we find a capacity too great for the object, as here we find an object too great for the heart. The world's pleasures and enjoyments failed to fill the soul of the man in Ecclesiastes— "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," was written upon them all; but Christ more than satisfies,—He is so great, as an object of love, that the heart cannot contain Him.

Christ is now on the throne; He has gone to the Father, and has sanctified. Himself—set Himself apart for God, at His right hand in heaven, after passing through death up to God, that He might have us sanctified in separation from the world by the truth of what He has done and where He now is, by the truth concerning His person, work, and glory. And only as we are in heart with Him in "His glorious home" will we sing in affectionate and joyful communion our "Song of songs," "UNTO HIM that loveth, us, and hath washed us from our sins in His own blood." The more thorough our practical sanctification—in the realization of resurrection life—from this present evil world, the more will we enjoy our exalted Lord, and sing of His person and work, His love and glory.

O that we only listened and overheard what He is saying of us in His holy Father's ear, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." He is now the earth-rejected, God-accepted One; and "as He is, so are we in this world." What power there is to sanctify in the fact of Jesus not being here, but gone to the Father!

This "Song of songs" is a song of the absent loved One, and a heart filled with longings for Him is breathing out its intense desire for communion. There are, thank God, still saints amongst us of the longing soul—pilgrims of the homeless heart. O that we knew it, beloved, more and more! O that in opening this book of love, this precious hymn were the utterance of all our hearts:

If I can truly say,

I will be able to enter into this fervent, unformal, impassioned utterance of the Bride, with which this "Song, of songs" opens, — "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, for thy love is better than wine."

Let us look at these three things, (1) The Bridegroom, (2) The kiss, (3) The love, and “learn of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us,” “for we love Him because He first loved us.”

1. “HIM.” — “Let Him kiss me,” tells of real intimacy and tenderest love. There was no naming of the Beloved: for why should the loved one speak like a stranger? There is but the one object present to the affections when the heart is really set on Jesus. As the rising sun not only dispels the darkness, but blots out by his superior light all the stars of night, so when Jesus, the “Sun of my soul, my Saviour dear,” rises in my heart, He not only banishes the night and darkness, but the most brilliant and sparkling objects of the night all disappear before His glorious light, for He is the Sun of my affections, and the sun rules the day. As even the glorious ones on the holy mount retired and left the disciples with Jesus only, so do even the best of saints when He is commended by the Father’s voice as His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, and we enter by the Spirit into the Father’s mind about Him.

There is none in the Bride’s vision here but One, and therefore there is no need to name the One who moves in solitary grandeur before the loving, longing soul. “We see Jesus;” we see “Him” alone; and now that the eye is single, how wonderfully soon the whole body is filled with light to discover His superlative excellences; and the heart overflows with the most expressive simplicity of love. “Let Him kiss me.” There is only One to whom I will accord this intimacy, for He has loved me and died for me; and now that He has gone to the Father, His heart is towards me still. I know that He settled all for me with God, when here on Calvary’s cross He bled and died, that He might redeem me from all iniquity, and have me purified to Himself, and made ready for the coming nuptial day when He shall present me “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,” and He is no longer a stranger to my happy soul, which He has redeemed and saved.

There is no question in this “Song of songs” of getting the relationship established. It is communion after all has been done to clear the soul of sin, to free and purify the affections and fix them on the all-worthy One.

The soul is now espoused to Christ, and longs for the tokens of His love: “Let Him kiss me.” This is the language of pure and unsuspecting love. This was how the loving, weeping “Mary at the Saviour’s tomb” spoke of the One who was nearest to her heart: “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him.”

Says an old author: “The pronoun is used without a consciousness of the absence of the antecedent. Her heart is so full that she supposes every one must know who she means by Him.”

How engrossed the heart must be to cause such an utterance as “Let Him kiss me.” The person of Christ must be known before there can be this engrossment: knowledge of truth by itself will never do it. But when we pass from the region of the mere doctrines of Christianity, until Christ Himself fill our soul and heart, then do we know, by personal experience, of this divine engrossment; and whether we look back into eternity or time, upward into heaven or onward into the great future, “we see Jesus,” and the entrancing sight thrills our souls and fills our hearts.

How the word holds “Him” before us as in a mirror! Are we the objects of His everlasting love? Then it is “according as He hath chosen us in HIM.” “Of HIM gave all the prophets witness;” and all the Old Testament may be entitled “the things concerning HIMSELF.” And if we look at the cross, and look on “Him whom we have pierced,” we find this testimony to His work accomplished for us there—who HIS OWN SELF bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Is it washing from sins? — “Unto HIM that loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in His own blood.” Justification? — “By HIM all who believe are justified from all things.” Is it standing? —then, “Found in Him” describes it. Occupation? — “That I may know HIM.” Is it present fellowship? — “Through HIM I have access to the Father, joint-heirs with Christ,” and ours is fellowship in risen life with the Father and the Son. And as to the future, He says, “I will come again, and receive you to MYSELF.” “The Lord HIMSELF shall descend from heaven” to fetch us, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord;” for “we believe we shall live together with HIM,” just as “we shall be saved from wrath through HIM.” When a risen Jesus draws near, and says, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I MYSELF,” then our hearts are filled with holy, worshipping joy, and we can truly enter into the abrupt ejaculation, “Let HIM kiss me,” etc.; for whether it be in the past, present, or future, “we see Jesus” — “Jesus Himself” — “JESUS ONLY.”

2. THE KISS. — “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.” The kiss here is the token and pledge of love. In Scripture we have kissing spoken of as a sign of worshipping reverence, — “Yet have I left seven thousand in Israel which have not bowed the knee unto Baal, and every mouth that hath not kissed him.” It is the expression of submission and obedience, as when Samuel anointed Saul “and kissed him,” as “captain over the Lord’s inheritance;” and so in the second Psalm we have “Kiss the Son.” It is also expressive of reconciliation, as when Joseph “kissed all his brethren... and after that, his brethren talked with him.” And when the father saw the son, in the parable, “he had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him,” and this was the prelude to all he did for him. It is chiefly employed as the expression of friendship and love, and as such it was enjoined in the early Church, “Greet one another with a kiss of love” (1 Pet. 5:14). It was this “kiss of love” that was given when David and Jonathan “kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded” (1 Sam. 21:41). We may truly say the divine David hath exceeded in both, for “Jesus wept” in friendship as none could weep, and He has greeted us with “a kiss of love” as none other could.

The language here is expressive of the Bride’s desire for the kiss of love— “O that He would kiss me” is the force of it. It will not satisfy my soul to read of the love of Jesus, to hear the most beautiful descriptions of it, or even to believe that He loves me; but I must, by the Holy Ghost, enjoy a sweet sense of it, be conscious of His loving nearness, and feel as if He were imprinting “a kiss of love” upon my favored cheek. The emotional in religion is the life and joy of it; and what emotion so commanding as love, and that love the love of God “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”? How entirely at fault is the religion of dogmatic intelligence, that stops short of the “O that He would kiss me.” The one is the knowledge of the letter, the other the communion of love—fellowship with the risen, living Lord Jesus, who lays His right hand upon us, saying, “Fear not: I am He that liveth and was dead.” It was when Jesus said “Mary,” that she replied Rabboni, and wished to embrace His feet. Nearness to, and fellowship with, the loved One are intensely craved where He is known as “the living One,” who was once “the dead One,” from love to us, for “the love of Christ constraineth, us.”

“Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.” As one says, “Permission to kiss the hand of a sovereign is considered an honor; but for that sovereign to give another the kisses of his mouth is evidence of the tenderest affection, and is the highest possible honor.”1

“The kisses of His mouth” is a phrase expressive of intense affection, and might be taken as referring to the gracious words which proceed out of His mouth. “His mouth is most sweet,” is said farther on. “Never man spake like this man.” Some take this longing dispensationally, as if it were the Old Testament saints’ longing for the Messiah. We might surely take it as expressive of the Church’s longing for His coming in person, and the joyful, happy intimacy of the glory at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It is said of the heavenly ones, Moses and Elias, that “they talked with Him.” When in the presence of superiors with whom we are not on terms of intimacy we wait until they talk to us; but here the intimacy of the glory is expressed in “there talked with Him two men,” and the subject was “the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” This proved to the disciples afterward “the kisses of His mouth,” when He appeared in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you,” while He showed them His hands and His side; for “then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” The hands and the side of the pierced One, shown to us, draw forth our hearts after Him. When even one from the many gracious words of His mouth reaches our souls when we are in trouble, we feel as if, by the Holy Ghost, they were bringing our beloved Lord so near that we felt the very “kisses of His mouth.”

How ravishing to the redeemed soul! “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth” is the language of one that knows already what it is to have such manifestations of His love: just like David, “To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen them in the sanctuary.”

3. THE LOVE.— “For Thy love is better than wine.” The word in the Hebrew is “loves,” as marking the variety, depth, and fullness of our royal Bridegroom’s love. Well may we sing—

“That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” Says one truly, “By the manifestation of Christ’s love to us, He begets in our souls a love to Him. His love is as the cause, our love as the effect; and, as Solomon saith of the rivers, that they both come from and return again unto the sea (Eccles. 1:7), so Christ is the ocean of spiritual love from whence we derive and into which we return our love.”2 How manifold His love!

(1.) It is everlasting: “He loved me.” “Christ also loved the Church;” but it was “with an everlasting love.” (2.) His is self-sacrificing love: He “gave Himself for me,” “for the Church.” (3.) He had a purpose of grace to carry out, and He redeemed us by His blood—washed us from our sins in His own blood. (4.) His is persevering love:

He loveth His own in the world to the end. He sends the Spirit for the wilderness, and He intercedes above, and He will have us with Him and like Him in glory, as the result of this love. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” “Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water, by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

The figure is “wine;” and the fact is “Thy love is better than wine.” Wine is sweet, refreshing, and exhilarating; but “Thy love is better than wine.” Look at the figure with which the royal Bridegroom’s love is compared.

(1.) Wine as a natural beverage. It was one of the blessings of the land of Canaan. It was one part of the ordinary diet of the people, and is so still in Eastern lands. It was refreshing—it cheered the heart (Ps. 104:15); “Wine maketh merry” (Eccles. 10:19); “Give wine to him that is of a heavy heart” (Prov. 31:6); “Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and let him remember his want no more” (verse 7). This expedient might suit a miserable worldling; but “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit,” is the Holy Ghost’s exhortation to us; and if so filled, He will so reveal Jesus in us in all His beauty and glory, that we shall have, as the happy outcome, a spiritual means of forgetting all about ourselves in “singing mutually in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts to the Lord.” “For Thy love is better than wine.”

(2.) Altar wine. Drink-offerings of wine (Num. 15:5) were poured on the ashes of the sacrifices “for a sweet savor unto the Lord,” in token that the Lord had accepted them. And surely this wine to us is cheering; this is the “wine that cheereth the heart of God and man” (Judges 9:13), the wine of the altar. God, as well as the believing soul, has His rest and joy in the finished sacrifice of Jesus; but His love is more to Him, for it was love to the Father that made Him finish His work. And so is it with us: we are cheered and refreshed, and have intense satisfaction and joy in the accomplished work of the cross, but we are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory as we have fellowship in love with Himself, whom, unseen, “we love.” “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Our unceasing song must be “unto Him who loveth us;” for “Thy love is better than wine,” even altar wine.

(3.) The wine of the Kingdom. What a day that will be for this earth when the King of Glory shall come to His kingdom, and when all the highest enjoyments of which men are capable shall be given in a world free from Satan, the curse, and warlike contention; when righteousness and peace shall be the prevailing characteristics, and all nations shall be blessed in Him—all nations call Him blessed. When He, the King-priest, shall “sit upon the throne of His glory,” and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of His glory as, the waters cover the sea. Then Jesus, who is patiently waiting (His kingdom being in abeyance) until He drink the wine in the kingdom, will have His kingdom over all, as the Man of Glory, and be no longer under the Nazarite vow of the present time of His rejection, in which we also share, but shall have all His regal rights and joys; and we, reigning with Him, shall have it fulfilled also “in the Kingdom of God” (Matt. 26:29). But Thy love is better, we shall say even then, than the wine of the kingdom; though we shall have to say, so far as earth is concerned, “Thou hast kept the good wine until now.” But His love to us, “in that day,” will be more than all the glory, blessing, and gladness of that glorious time of “The Regeneration.”

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