

Nearer and Dearer

A sermon

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"I sleep, but my heart wakes: it is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put his hand by the hole of the door, and my heart was moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spoke: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that want about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I am sick of love." Song of Solomon 5:2-8.

THE most healthy state for a Christian is that of unbroken and intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. From such a state of heart he should never decline. "Abide in Me, and I in you," is the loving precept of our ever loving Lord. But, alas, my Brethren, as in this world our bodies are subject to many sicknesses, so our souls, also, by reason of the body of this death with which we are encompassed, are often sorely afflicted with sin, sickness, and an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the Lord. We are not what we might be. We are not what we should be. We are not what we shall be. We are not what we wish to be. I fear that many of us are not walking in the light of God's countenance, are not resting with our heads upon the Savior's bosom, nor sitting with Mary at the Master's feet. We dwell in Kedar rather than Zion, and sojourn in Mesech rather than Jerusalem.

Spiritual sickness is very common in the Church of God, and the root of the mischief lies in distance from Jesus— following Christ afar off—and yielding to a drowsy temperament. Away from Jesus, away from joy. Without the sun the flowers pine. Without Jesus our hearts faint. My object, this morning, is to put myself into the hands of the Holy Spirit that He may now come, and, like a physician, prescribe for you, if any of you in your hearts have become like the spouse in this part of the Song, that you may as fully imitate her in that

which is good as in that which is blameworthy. If you do not soon find your Beloved to your soul's joy, may you at least, like the spouse, declare that you are "sick of love," and continue to follow His track until you overtake Him.

I. Commencing where the text begins, we observe that the spouse confesses A VERY COMMON SIN. She cries, "I sleep." She had no right to be asleep, for her beloved knew no rest. He was standing outside in the cold street, with his head wet with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night. Why should she be at ease? He was anxiously seeking her, how was it that she could be so cruel as to yield to slumber? It is a most unseasonable thing, my Brothers and Sisters, for any of us to be indolent and indifferent, for we profess to have gone forth to meet the Bridegroom, and it is shameful for us to sleep because He tarries for a little while.

The world is perishing. We are sent into the world instrumentally to be its saviors—how dishonorable that with such necessities for activity and with such noble ends to be served by industry—we should fold our arms and delight ourselves in indolence! Nothing can be more inexcusable than for us to sleep, seeing that we are not of the night nor of darkness. If we had been the children of the night it might seem according to our nature for us to be sluggards. But we have avowed that the light of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has shone into our eyes—let us not, therefore, sleep as others do—but let us watch and be sober, for they that sleep, sleep in the night. And since the night is past to us, it is highly indecent and improper that we should still continue to toss upon the bed of sloth.

No time for slumber, it seems to me, can be more unseasonable to the Christian than the present one, for the world is reeking with wickedness, and superstitions like the frogs of Egypt are covering the land. Everyone who is but so much as half awake can see the enemy industriously sowing tares among the wheat! Shall the watchmen of Zion continue to slumber on their watchtowers when the foe is undermining the bulwarks? Shall the shepherds sleep when the wolf has broken into the fold? Shall the seamen sleep when the gale is furiously driving the vessel upon the rocks? So far as our own hearts are concerned we have no private reasons for slumbering, for our daily cares require watchfulness. The temptations which assail us every hour demand of us that we should stand with our loins girt—our abounding enemies all warn us that our danger is extreme unless we are always fully equipped in our celestial armor.

If we must sleep, let it be in a less dangerous position than these hostile lands through which we march today. There will be rest enough on the other side of Jordan where the drawn sword is exchanged for the well-tuned harp. But to be careless now is to sleep in the midst of a bloody conflict, to dream upon the verge of a precipice, and to sport in the jaws of death! From our beds let the Master's voice arouse us, for He cries aloud, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Do you not find, my Brethren, that almost unconsciously to yourselves a spirit of indifference steals over you? You do not give up private prayer, but

alas, it becomes a mere mechanical operation. You do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, but still your bodily presence is all that is given and you derive no refreshment from the unspiritual exercise.

Have you not sat at the Lord's Table spiritually asleep? Has not the heavenly Watcher detected your soul nodding when the sacred emblems have been spread before you, or even in your mouth? Have you not been content with the bare symbols, which are barrenness, while the spiritual essence, which is marrow and fatness, you have not tasted? I find from the very fact that I am always engaged in the Master's service from the early morning till far into the night, that I become dull and carnal. I become cumbered with much serving so that I have to question the vitality of my religion because its freshness and vigor flag. It is grievous to go on like a clock which is wound up, not because you rejoice in the work, but because you must.

My soul shudders at the thought of routine religion, formal service, dead devotion, mechanical godliness! What a mercy to reach the fresh springs, to feel a daily renewed youth, an anointing with fresh oil! For this I pine and pant. One gets driving on in the dark, as coachmen sometimes do when they are asleep on the box—dangerous work, this! I know that I am safe in Christ, but I would gladly suffer anything rather than become habitually of a slumbering heart. Better smart under the long whip of affliction, or feel the stings of conscience, or even the darts of the devil than lie down in carnal security's lap to be shorn of one's locks by the Philistines! Yet I fear this has been my case. I do not know how far my confession may be echoed by my Brothers today, but I am shrewdly suspicious that the more wakeful you are, the more heartily will you acknowledge a terrible tendency in the other direction.

Again let me remind you that to sleep now is an evil thing, dangerous to yourselves, a cruel thing to others, an ungrateful act towards Christ and dishonorable to His cause. Shall such a King be served by lie-a-bed soldiers? Shall His midnight pleadings be repaid by our daylight sleepiness? Shall an agony of bloody sweat be recompensed by heavy eyelids and yawning mouths? Away, forever away, O you who are redeemed by the Well-Beloved, with this detestable slumber, of which I fear you must honestly confess yourselves to have been guilty!

II. The song before us reminds us of A HOPEFUL SIGN. "My heart wakes." What a riddle the Believer is! He is asleep, and yet he is awake! His true self, the I, the veritable Ego of the man is asleep—but yet his heart, his truest self, his affections are awake. The Believer is a standing paradox. He cannot even understand himself. The wakefulness of the heart, does it not mean just this? "I sleep, but I am not content to be asleep"? The true Believer is not satisfied to slumber. Time was when if he could have pacified his conscience, he would have been extremely thankful, however deadly might have been the drug which caused the

slumber. But now the man starts, shivers, tosses to and fro in his sleep, is tired by his rest, dreams horribly, and cries to be awakened.

The saved man cannot be happy in a false and rotten peace. The Divine life within struggles against the monstrous serpent of sin which tries to twist its folds of sleep around it. No renewed heart can enjoy perfect rest while conscious of being an idler in the vineyard, and a loiterer in the race. Backsliding Believer, does your heart wake? If so, you will know it, for it will smite you, it will upbraid you and demand of you whom you are, that you should thus behave yourself! Elect of God, and yet asleep while Jesus is dishonored? Redeemed by blood, and yet mispending time which belongs to your Redeemer? Married to Christ, and yet absent from your Husband and content without a smile from His dear face? How can it be? Be ashamed and be confounded, and never show your face anymore, for this is ingratitude of the deepest dye!

It is a hopeful sign when a man can conscientiously say as much as the spouse in this case, but remember it is not much to say. Do not pride yourself upon it. Be ashamed that you should be asleep at all. Do not congratulate yourself that your heart is awake. Be thankful that infinite love affords you Divine Grace enough to keep your heart alive, but be ashamed that you have no more when more may be had and should be had. Mere longings and moans are so small a work of Grace that they should alarm rather than console. It will be a foul temptation of Satan if you are led to say, "I am content to sleep so long as my heart does but wake." Firm resolves of amendment are necessary but something more than resolves.

Alas, I have need to add these few words because the most of our resolutions vanish into thin air. We get as far as this, "I am not quite content to be in such a lukewarm state of mind, and I will therefore, by-and-by, endeavor to arouse myself and renounce this downy bed of sloth." This is not much to say, for it is no more than we ought to do. It is all the less, because we so seldom keep the vow, but like the disturbed sluggard we turn over to the other side and mutter sullenly, "A little more folding of the hands to sleep." I fear that there are thousands of God's children who are enough awake to know that they are asleep, convinced enough of their wrong to know that they are wrong, and to hope that they will one day be better, but alas, they continue in the same unhallowed condition!

May I invite every Believer to make a strict examination of his own spiritual state. My Brother, you may be sleeping through great worldly prosperity, for nothing tends to slumber more surely than a gentle rocking in the cradle of luxury. On the other hand you may be sleeping because of overwhelming sorrow, even as the 11 fell asleep when our Lord was in the garden. Some make a downy pillow of their wealth, but others fall asleep in their poverty like Jacob with a stone for his pillow. To be surrounded with constant worldly occupation, to be oppressed with many cares in business—this is to pass through the enchanted ground. And happy is the man who has Grace enough to overcome the influence of his position.

Now, if your heart is today sufficiently awake to tell you that you are not living as near to God as you were some years ago—that you have not the love to Him you once had and that your warmth and zeal for Christ has departed from you—I beseech you hear the voice of Jesus Christ: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." "Repent and do your first works." Turn unto your Savior now, that this very day before the sun goes down you may rejoicingly exclaim, "I have found Him whom my soul loves! I will hold Him, and will not let Him go."

III. The third thing in the text is A LOVING CALL. Asleep as the spouse was, she knew her husband's voice, for this is an abiding mark of God's people. "My sheep hear My voice." A half sleeping saint still has spiritual discernment enough to know when Jesus speaks. At first the Beloved simply knocked. His object was to enter into fellowship with His Church, to reveal Himself to her, to unveil His beauties, to solace her with His Presence. And such is the object of our blessed Lord this morning in bringing us to this House. I hope this sermon will be a knock—I trust my discourse may give many knocks at the door of every backsliding Believer here.

Jesus cries, "Open to Me! Open to Me!" Will you not admit your Savior? You love Him. He gave Himself for you, He pleads for you! Let Him into your soul, commune with Him this morning. When you turn to read His Word, every promise is a knock. He says, "Come and enjoy this promise with Me, for it is yes and amen in Me." Every threat is a knock. Every precept is a knock. In outward Providences every benefit which we receive through our Mediator's intercession is a gentle knock from His pierced hands, saying, "Take this mercy, but open to Me! It comes to you through Me! Open to Me!" Every affliction is a knock at our door. That wasting sickness, that broken bone, that consumptive daughter, that rebellious child, that burning house, that shipwrecked vessel and dishonored bill—all these are Christ's knockings, saying, "These things are not your joys, these worldly things can afford no rest for the soles of your feet. Open to Me, open to Me! These idols I am breaking, these joys I am removing. Open to Me, and find in Me a solace for all your woes."

Knocking, alas, seems to be of little use to us. We are so stubborn and so ungenerous towards our heavenly Bridegroom, that He, the Crucified, the immortal Lover of our souls may stand and knock, and knock, and knock again, and the preacher and adversity may be His double hammer, but yet the door of the heart will not yield. Then the bridegroom tried his voice. If knocking would not do, he would speak in plain and plaintive words, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." The Lord Jesus Christ has a sweet way of making the Word come home to the conscience. I mean not, now, that effectual and irresistible power of which we shall speak by-and-by, but that lesser force which the heart may resist, but which renders it very guilty for so doing.

Some of you who are the Lord's people have heard soft and sweet whispers in your heart, saying, "You are saved. Now, My Beloved, live in the light of salvation. You are a member

of My mystical body, draw near and enjoy fellowship with Me, such as a member ought to have with its Head." Do you not see the Lord Jesus beckoning to you with a gentle finger, and saying, "Come with Me oftener into the closet of secret prayer. Get oftener alone to muse on things Divine. Acquire the habit of walking with Me in your business. Abide in Me, and I in you"? Do not these admonitions visit you like angels' whispers, and have you not too often resisted them? Have you not been thoughtful for them for the moment, and recorded them in your diary, and then forgotten them and lived as frigidly as you had done before, though the Sun of Righteousness was waiting to arise upon you with healing beneath His wings?

Now, Beloved, observe the appeals which the beloved here makes. He says, "Open to me," and his plea is the love the spouse has to him, or professes to have—the love he has to her, and the relationship which exists between them. "Open to me, my sister." Next akin to me, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, born of the same mother, for Jesus is "the Seed of the woman," even as we are. One with us in our humanity, He takes each human heart that believes to be His mother, and sister and brother. "Open to Me, My sister." If you are so nearly related to Jesus, why do you act so coldly towards Him? If, indeed, He is your closest kinsman, how is it that you live so far remote, and come not to visit Him, neither open the doors of your heart to entertain Him?

"My dove," my gentle one, my favorite, my innocent. Oh, if you are, indeed, His dove, how can you rest away from the dovecote? How can you be satisfied without your Mate? One turtledove pines without the other, how is it you do not pine to have fellowship with the dear Husband of your soul? "My Love," Jesus calls us what we profess to be! We say we love Him. Yes, and unless we have been dreadfully deceived, we do love Him. It brings the tears to my eyes to think that I should so often be indifferent to Him, and yet I can say it as before Him, "You know all things, You know that I love You." Brothers and Sisters, if we love Him, let us crave His Presence in our souls! How miserable must it be to live as some do day after day without a real soul-stirring Heaven-moving prayer! Are there not some who continue week after week without searching the Word and without rejoicing in the Lord?

Oh, wretched life of banishment from bliss! Dear Hearer, can you be satisfied to go forth into the world and to be so occupied with it that you never have a desire towards Heaven? If so, mourn over such backsliding, since it exiles you from your best Beloved's bosom! The bridegroom adds another title, "my undefiled." There is a spiritual chastity which every Believer must maintain. Our heart belongs to no one but Christ. All other lovers must be gone. He fills the throne. He has bought us—no other paid a part of the price—He shall have us altogether. He has taken us into personal union with Himself—of His mystical body we make up a part. We ought, therefore, to hold ourselves as chaste virgins unto Christ, undefiled

with the pollutions of the flesh and the rivalries of earthly loves. To the undefiled, Jesus says, "Open to Me."

Oh, I am ashamed, this morning, to be preaching from such a text! Ashamed of myself most of all, that I should need to have such a text applied to my own soul! Why, Beloved, if Christ deigns to enter into such a poor miserable cottage as our nature is, ought we not to entertain the King with the best we have, and feel that the first seat at our table is all too poor and too mean for Him? What if in the midst of this dark night our Beloved comes to us who profess to love Him? Shall He have to knock and speak and plead by every sweet and endearing title, and yet shall we refuse to arise and give Him the fellowship He craves? Did you notice that powerful argument with which the heavenly Lover closed His cry? He said, "My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night."

Ah, sorrowful remembrances, for those drops were not the ordinary dew that fall upon the houseless traveler's unprotected head! His head was wet with scarlet dew, and His locks with crimson drops of a tenfold night of God's desertion, when He "sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground." My Heart, how vile you are, for you shut out the Crucified! Behold the Man crowned with thorns and scourged, with traces of the spit of the soldiers— can you close the door on Him? Will you despise the "despised and rejected of men"? Will you grieve the "Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? Do you forget that He suffered all this for you, for you, when you deserve nothing at His hands? After all this will you give Him no recompense, not even the poor return of admission to your loving communing?

I am afraid some of you Believers think it a very small thing to live a day or two without fellowship with God in prayer. Probably you have fallen into such a sleepy state that you can read your Bible without enjoyment, and yet you do not feel it to be any very remarkable thing that it is so. You come to and fro to the Tabernacle and listen to the Gospel, and it does not come home to you with the power it once had—and yet you do not feel at all alarmed about it. My Master does not treat your state of mind with the same indifference that you do, for it causes Him pain, and though as Mediator His expiatory griefs are finished once and for all, yet He has anguish, still, over your indifference and coldness of heart. These sorrows are the drops that bedew His head—these are the dewdrops that hang about His raven locks.

O will you grieve Him? Will you open all His wounds and crucify Him afresh? Will you put Him to open shame? Doors of the heart, fly open! Though rusted upon your hinges, open at the coming of the sorrowful Lover who was smitten of God and afflicted! Surely the argument of His grief should prevail instantly with every honest heart! He whose head is wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night must not be kept standing in the street—it behooves us that He is entertained with our warmest love! It is imperative that He is housed at once.

IV. Yet the spouse hastened not to open the door, and I am afraid the like delay may be charged upon some of us. Our shame deepens as we pursue our theme and think how well our own character is photographed here by the wise man, for notice, in the fourth place, that after the knocking and the pleading, the spouse made A MOST UNGENEROUS EXCUSE. She sat like a queen and knew no sorrow. She had put off her garments and washed her feet as travelers do in the East before they go to rest. She was taking her ease in full security and therefore she said to her beloved, "I have put off my tunic, I cannot robe myself again. As for my feet, I have washed them, and to tread the floor to open the door would defile them. Therefore, I pray you have me excused."

A bad excuse was, in this case, far worse than none, because it was making one sin an apology for another. Why did she put off her coat? The bridegroom had not come—she should have stood with her loins girt about and her lamp trimmed. Why had she washed her feet? It was right to do so if the emblem had indicated purity, but it indicated carnal ease. She had left holy labor for carnal rest. Why did she do these things? She thus makes her wicked slumber and inaction to be an excuse for barring out her husband. My dear Brothers and Sisters, there is a temptation which is very cunning on the part of Satan, and perhaps he will exercise that upon some of you this morning. While I have been preaching, you have said, "Well, that is just like me. The text fully opens up my experience." And then the devil will say, "Be satisfied! You see you are in the same condition as the spouse was, therefore it is all right."

Oh, damnable temptation! What can be more vile than this, that because another has sinned against the Beloved, I am to be content to sin in the same way? Perhaps you will turn this sad course of conduct in the ancient spouse into an excuse for your own negligence. Shall I English the excuse she made? It is this—"O Lord, I know that if I am to enter into much fellowship with You, I must pray very differently from what I have done of late. But it is too much trouble! I cannot stir myself to energy so great. My time is so taken up with my business! I am so constantly engaged that I could not afford even a quarter of an hour for retirement. I have to cut my prayers short." Is this, in part, the miserable excuse?

Shall I go on? Shall I expose more of this dishonorable apology? It is this—"I do not want to begin an examination of myself. It may reveal so many unpleasant truths. I sleep, and it is very comfortable to sleep. I do not want to be driven out of my comforts. Perhaps if I were to live nearer to Christ I should have to give up some of the things which I so much enjoy. I have become conformed to the world of late. I am very fond of having Mr. So-and-So to spend an hour with me in the evening and his talk is anything but that which my Master would approve of but I cannot give him up. I have taken to read religious novels. I could not expect to have the Lord Jesus Christ's company when I am poring over such trash as that, but still I prefer it to my Bible. I would sooner read a fool's tale than I would read of Jesus' love."

How ashamed I feel this morning, to have to put into words like these, the sins of some of you! But my words are literal truth. Do not many of you live as if you had a name to live, and were dead? Jesus Christ comes and knocks this morning, and reminds you that the happiest life is living near to Him! That the holiest, purest, sweetest hours you ever had were those in which you threw yourselves upon Him and gave up all beside. He reminds you of your better days. O do not, I pray you, offer Him frivolous and vexatious excuses. O despise not your Lord who died for you—in whose name you live and with whom you hope to reign forever—who is to wrap you about with glory in the day of His appearing!

Let it not be said that He is pushed into a corner and His love despised while the vile painted-faced world takes up the love of your life! It should not be so! It is baseness itself on our part when it is so. Still as a wonder of wonders, although shamefully and cruelly treated, the beloved husband did not go away. We are told that he "put his hand by the hole of the door," and then the heart of his spouse was moved for him. In the Eastern door there is generally a place near the lock into which a man may put his hand, and there is a pin inside which, if removed, unfastens the door. Each one of these locks is different from another, so that no one usually understands how to open the door except the master.

So the Master in this case did not actually open the door—you notice the spouse did that, but he pulled out the pin, so that she could see his hand—she could see that the door was not fast closed now he had removed the bar. "My Beloved put his hand by the hole of the door." Does not this picture THE WORK OF EFFECTUAL GRACE, when the Truth of God does not appeal to the ear alone, but comes to the heart? When it is no longer a thing thought on and discussed and forgotten, but an arrow which has penetrated into the reins, and sticks fast in the loins to our wounding—and ultimately to our spiritual healing?

No hand is like Christ's hand! When He puts His hand to the work it is well done. He "put in His hand"—not His hand on me to smite me, but His hand in me to comfort me, to sanctify me. He put in His hand, and straightway His beloved began to pity Him, and to lament her unkindness. She thought, as she looked at that hand pierced with the nail mark, "O Jesus, have I no love for You? Have You done all this for me, and have I been a transparent hypocrite after all, and locked You out when I ought to have admitted You? I have used no other friend so badly. I should have been ashamed to have thought of such conduct even to a foe. But You! O You who have done more for me than mother, brother, husband, friend could have done! To You I have been an ingrate most base and willful."

Her heart was moved with repentance. Her eyes gushed with tears and she rose to let him in. As she arose she first buckled on her garments, and then she searched for the alabaster box of precious ointment that she might anoint his weary feet and dewy locks. No sooner did she reach the door, than notice the love of God to her! Her "hands dropped with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet smelling myrrh." Here is the Holy Spirit come to help our infirmities. She begins to pray and the Holy Spirit helps her! She begins already to enjoy the

sweetness, not of communion, but of the very desire after communion. For, Beloved, when our tears begin to flow because we are far from Christ, those holy drops have myrrh in them. When we begin to pray for Divine Grace there is a blessedness even about our yearning, and longing, and sighs, and panting, and pining! Our fingers drop with sweet smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock. A function from the Holy One descends upon the soul when it is earnestly seeking for its Beloved. But that ought never to satisfy us!

Behold another temptation of the devil—he will say to you, "On this very morning you felt some sweetness in hearing about Christ. Your hands have evidently dropped with myrrh upon the handles of the lock." Yes, but still it is not the myrrh that will content the loving heart, it is Christ she wants! And if not only hands, but lips and feet and her whole frame had dropped with myrrh, this would never have contented her until she could get the Lord Himself. I pray you, Beloved, if the life of Jesus is in you of a truth, rest not satisfied with all the Graces and the promises and the doctrines and the gifts of the Spirit of God, but seek after this most excellent gift—to know Christ, and to be found in Him—to say of Him, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me," And, yet more, "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand does embrace me." It was that effectually putting in of the hand that moved her. O Lord, grant the like unto us!

VI. But now, in the sixth place, observe THE DESERVED CHASTISEMENT which the bridegroom inflicted. When her spouse was willing to commune, she was not. And now that she is willing, and even anxious, what happens? I wish to describe this to you because some of you may have felt it, and others of you who never have, but have preserved your intimacy with Christ up till now, may be warned by it. The newly awakened one went to the door and opened it to her beloved, for though he was gone, she did not doubt of her love, nor of his love to her. "I opened to my beloved, but," says the Hebrew, "He had gone, he had gone."

The voice of lamentation, the reduplicated cry of one that is in bitter distress! There must have been a sad relief about it to her sinful heart, for she must have felt afraid to look her dear one in the face after such heartless conduct. But sad as it would have been to face him, it was infinitely sadder to say, "He is gone, he is gone." Now she begins to use the means of Grace in order to find Him. "I sought Him," she said, "and I found Him not. I went up to the House of God. The sermon was sweet, but it was not sweet to me, for He was not there. I went to the communion table, and the ordinance was a feast of fat things to others, but not to me, for He was not there! I sought Him, but I could not find Him."

Then she betook herself to prayer. She had neglected that before, but now she supplicated in real earnest, "I called Him. I said to Him, Come, my Beloved, my heart wakes for You. Jesus, reveal Yourself to me as You do not to the world"—

"I thirst, I faint, I die to prove The sweetness of redeeming love, Your love, O Christ, to me."

Her prayers were many. She kept them up by day and by night. "I called Him, but He gave me no answer." She was not a lost soul—do not think that! Christ loved her just as much, then, as before, no, loved her a great deal more. If there can be any change in Christ's love, He must have much more approved of her when she was seeking Him in sorrow than when she was reclining upon the conch and neglecting Him. But He was gone, and all her calling could not bring Him back.

What did she do? Why, she went to His ministers—she went to those who were the watchmen of the night, and what did they say to her? Did they cheer her? Perhaps they had never passed through her experience. Perhaps they were mere hirelings. However it might be, they struck her. Sometimes the truthful preaching of the Gospel will smite a child of God when he gets out of his walk with God, and it is right it should be so. But they did more than strike, they "wounded" her until she began to bleed from the wounds given by the very men whom she hoped would have comforted her. "Surely," she might have said, "you know where the city's King is, for you are the city's guards!" But she received no comfort.

When a poor soul in this case flies to an unsympathizing minister, he will say, "Well, you say you have lost the Presence of Christ, you should bestir yourself to find it." "Yes," says the spouse, "I rose up and opened to Him." "You should use the means." "But I have used the means. I sought Him, but I found Him not." "You should pray." "I did pray. I called Him, but He gave me no answer." "Well then," perhaps they will add, "you should wait patiently for Him." "Oh, but," she says, "I cannot, I must have Him now! I am sick of love." And then perhaps the minister will be sharp, and say, "I fear you are not a child of God."

Now what is that? Why, that is taking away the veil from the mourning seeker! That is plucking away the ensign of sincerity from the benighted seeker! No woman went into the streets of Jerusalem without her veil, unless she was of the baser sort, and the watchmen seemed to say to this woman, "You are of ill name, or you would not be here at this time of night crying out for one you have lost." Oh, cruel work to pull off her veil and expose her, when she was already wretched enough! Sometimes a sharp sentence from a true minister may set a poor soul in the stocks who ought rather to have been comforted. I hope these hands will never pull away the veil from any of you poor mourning lovers of Christ. Far rather would these lips tell Him when I speak with Him that you are sick of love!

But it cannot be helped at all times, for when we are dealing with the hypocrite, the tender child of God thinks we mean him. And when we are speaking against the formalist, as we must do, the genuine Believer writes bitter things against himself. When the fan is in our hand, and we are seeking thoroughly to purge the floor, it sometimes happens that some of the lighter wheat gets blown a little away with the chaff, and so distress is brought to weak but real children of God. If so, remember it is not our fault, for we would not grieve you—it is your fault for having lost your Beloved, for if you had not lost Him, you would not have been saying, "Tell me where I shall find Him!" You would have been rejoicing in Him, and

no watchmen would have struck you, and no keepers of the walls would have taken away your veil from you, for Jesus would have been your Protector and your Friend.

VII. Now, to close. As the poor spouse did not, then, find Christ, but was repulsed in all ways, she adopted A LAST EXPEDIENT. She knew that there were some who had daily fellowship with the King—daughters of Jerusalem who often saw him, and therefore she sent a message by them, "If you see my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love." Enlist your brother saints to pray for you! Go with them to their gatherings for prayer. Their company will not satisfy you without Jesus, but their company may help you find Jesus. Follow the footsteps of the flock, and you may, by-and-by discover the Shepherd.

And what a message it is to send to Christ! Do not send it by other people's lips only, send it by your own! Tell Him, "I am sick of love." This is, of all things, the most painful, and the most happy thing in all the world. This is a sickness that I should like to die of, but I should like to feel it in rather a different shape from this. There are two love-sicknesses in Solomon's Song. The one is when the spouse longs for the presence of her lord, and the second is when she gets that presence—then he is so glorious to her, that she is ready to die with excessive joy, and she exclaims, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love."

If you cannot get the second, remember that the first is the clear way to it. Resolve in your heart, my Brothers and Sisters, that you never will be happy till you win the face of Christ! Settle it in your soul that there shall be no end to your cries and tears till you can say with all your heart, "My Beloved is near to me. I can speak to Him. I am in the enjoyment of His love." If you can be content without it you shall go without it, but if you must have it you shall have it. If your hunger will break through stone walls to reach your Lord, no stone walls shall keep Him from you. If you are insatiable after Christ, He will feed you with Himself.

If you bid goodbye to all the dainties of the world and all its sweet draughts and its delicacies, and must have Christ, and Christ alone, then no hungering soul shall long be kept without Him. He must come to you. There are cords that draw Him to you at this hour. His love draws you to Him, but your love draws Him close to you. Be not afraid. Your soul shall be like the chariots of Amminadab—perhaps even this morning—and you shall go your way rejoicing! The Lord grant it may be so for His love's sake. Amen.