

The Real Presence, the Great Want of the Church

A Sermon

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'It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.'[Song of Solomon 3:4-5](#).

IS IT NECESSARY to say that the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer corporeally present in his church? It ought not to be needful to assert so evident a truth; and yet it is important to do so, since there are some who teach that in what they are pleased to call 'the Holy Sacrament.' Christ is actually present in his flesh and blood. Such persons unwittingly deny the real humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, for if he has indeed assumed our humanity, and is in all points made like unto his brethren, his flesh and blood cannot be in two places at one time. Our bodily humanity could not be present in more places than one at one time, and if Christ's humanity be like ours it cannot be in an unlimited number of places at once; in fact, it can only be in one place. Where that place is we know from Scripture, for he sitteth at the right hand of God, expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. Unless you are to suppose that the humanity of Christ is something altogether different from ours, it cannot be here and there and everywhere; but to suppose that it is a different humanity from ours is to deny that he is Incarnate in our nature. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples that he would go away, and he has gone away. He ascended into heaven, bearing humanity up to the throne of God. 'He is not here, for he is risen.'

Remember, also, that because the Lord Jesus is absent corporeally, the Holy Spirit the Comforter is with us, for he especially said, 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you.' Those who believe that Christ's flesh and blood are or can be present on earth, deny the presence of the Holy Spirit; for the Scripture is plain enough upon that point that the bodily absence of our Lord is the cause and condition of the presence of the Comforter. If Jesus dwells still corporeally upon the earth, then the Spirit of God is not upon the earth. Many other most serious errors follow from the supposition that the humanity of the Redeemer is present anywhere except at the right hand of God, even the Father; yet it is an imagination which lies at the basis of the sacramental system, and thousands are greatly enamoured of it.

No word of mine this morning is intended to have the remotest connection with any sacramental presence of the corporeal nature of our Lord; our mind has a far other matter before it. Let us, therefore, having guarded ourselves so as not to be misunderstood, proceed to speak of another presence of our blessed Lord. The fact is, that Christ Jesus, the Lord, is present in his church by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is this day the representative of Christ in the midst of the church, and it is in the power and the energy of the Holy Ghost that Christ is with us always, and will be even to the end of the world. As God, Jesus is everywhere; as man, he is only in heaven; as God and man in one person, Mediator and Head of the Church, he is present with us by the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, whom the Father has sent in his name. It is by the working of the Spirit of God that Christ's presence in the church is manifested; and we are to expect no other presence than that: we have the spiritual divine presence of the second person of the blessed Trinity, and the presence of Christ Jesus also in the power of his representative on earth, the Holy Ghost. This presence, not a bodily but a spiritual presence, is the glory of the church of God. When she is without it she is shorn of her strength; when she possesses it all good things ensue. Brethren, if a church be without the Spirit of God in it, it may have a name to live, but it is dead, and, you know, that after death there follows corruption, corruption which breeds foulness and disease. Hence, those churches which have turned aside unto error, have not only lost all power to do good, but they have become obnoxious and the causes of great evil in the midst of the world. If any professing church abides not in Christ it is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and while it is decaying, it is injurious, and there is need for the world's welfare that it be utterly destroyed. We must have Christ in the church, or the body which was meant to be the medium of the greatest good becomes the source of the grossest evil. Let the Spirit of God be in the church, then there is power given to all her ministries; whether they be ministries of public testimony in the preaching of the word, or ministries of holy love amongst the brethren, or ministries of individual earnestness to the outside world, they will all be clothed with energy, in the fullness of the power of the Lord Jesus. Then her ordinances become truly profitable, then baptism is burial with the Lord, and the sacred supper is a feast of love; then the communion of the brethren in their solemn prayer and praise becomes deep and joyful, and their whole life and walk are bright with the glow of heaven. In the presence of the Lord the graces of the saints are developed; the church grows rich in all spiritual gifts; her warfare becomes victorious, and her continual worship sweet as the incense of the golden censor. What the moon is to the night, or the sun to the day, or the Nile to Egypt, or the dew to the tender herb, or the soul to the human frame, that is the presence of Jesus to his church. Give us the Spirit of God and we will ask no endowments from the State, nor sigh for the prestige of princely patronage. Endow us, O God, with the Holy Ghost, and we have all we need. The poverty of the members, their want of learning, their want of rank, all these shall be as nothing. The Holy Ghost can make amends for all deficiencies,

and clothe his poor and obscure people with an energy at which the world shall tremble. This made the apostolic church mighty, she had the Holy Ghost outpoured upon her: the lack of this made the medieval ages dark as midnight, for men contended about words and letters, but forgot the Spirit: the return of this inestimable blessing has given us every true revival: the working of the eternal Spirit, the presence of Christ in the midst of his people is the Sun of Righteousness arising with healing beneath his wings. This has been our confidence, as a church, these eighteen years, and if we are yet to see greater and better things, we must still rely on this same strength, the divine presence of Jesus Christ by the wonder-working Spirit. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'

It becomes then the great desire of every earnest Christian who loves the church of God, that Christ should be in the church, and that by his Spirit he should work wonders there, and I have selected this text with the view of stirring up the spiritual-minded among you to seek so great a blessing. Let me endeavor, in opening up this blessed text, to show the means and the course of action necessary if we would see the church revived by her Lord's presence.

I. And first, we learn from the text that before ever we can bring the Well-Beloved into our mother's house, the church, WE MUST FIND HIM PERSONALLY FOR OURSELVES.

We begin with that. 'It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth.' How can we bring into the chamber of the church him whom we have not yet met with ourselves? How can we communicate grace to others instrumentally, unless, first of all, we have received it into our own hearts? I am not now about to speak of the need of conversion; we all know that no spiritual act can be performed until we become spiritual men; but I am now speaking about something higher than bare conversion. If we would bless the church, we must ourselves occupy a higher platform than that of being merely saved; we must be believers, walking in fellowship with Christ, and having, in that respect, found him whom our soul loveth. There are many believers who have only just enough grace to enable us to hope that they are alive; they have no strength with which to work for God's cause, they have not an arm to lend to the help of others, neither can they even see that which would comfort others, for they are blind, and cannot see afar off, they want all their sight, and all their strength, for themselves. Those who are to bring the Well-Beloved into our mother's house, must be of another kind. They must get beyond the feebleness which is full of doubting and fearing, into the assurance which grasps the Savior, and the fellowship which lives in daily communion with him. I know there are some such in this church, and I would single them out, and speak to them thus: 'Brother, if thou wouldst bring Christ into the church which thou lovest, then, first of all, *thine inmost soul must so love Christ, that thou canst not live without his company*. This must be thy cry: 'Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?' and this must be the goal of thine aspirations: 'I have found him whom my soul loveth.' It must not be talk, it must be soul-love; it must not be a profession of affection for Jesus, but the inmost bowels of our being must be moved by his name. The words are

very strong, 'him whom my soul loveth;' as if though the spouse might love the daughters of Jerusalem, might love the watchmen of the city, might love them all in their place, yet her soul's love, the essence of her love, her deepest, fondest, purest, and most real love, was all for him. Are there not such hearts here, virgin minds in whom Christ is first, last, midst, chief, and all in all? Oh, if there be, ye are the men, ye are the women, who, finding your Beloved, can bring him into the church. May God multiply your number, and may each of you have compassion on the languishing church of this chill age, and labor to restore to her the glory which has faded from her brow. Pray ye for Laodicea in her lukewarmness, and Sardis in her spiritual death; but you will only prevail in proportion as your inmost soul loves the Redeemer and abides in his love.

These ardent lovers of Jesus *must diligently seek him*. The chapter before us says that the spouse sought him, sought him on her bed, sought him in the streets, sought him in the broadways, sought him at last at the lips of the watchmen, sought him everywhere where he was likely to be found. We *must* enjoy the perpetual fellowship of Jesus. We who love him in our souls cannot rest until we know that he is with us. I fear that with some of us our sins have grieved him, and he has betaken himself to the far-off 'mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense.' It may be our lax living, our neglect of prayer, or some other fault, has taken from us the light of his countenance. Let us resolve this morning that there shall be no rest unto our souls until once again he has returned unto us in the fullness of his manifested love, to abide in our hearts. Seek him, brother, seek him, sister. He is not far from any of you, but do seek him with an intense longing for him, for until thou dost thou art not the man to bring him into the assembly of the brethren. Labor to bring Jesus into the chambers of the church, but first be sure that thou hast him thyself, or thy zeal will be hypocrisy.

In seeking our Lord we must *use all ministries*. The spouse enquired of the watchmen. We are not to despise God's servants, for he is usually pleased to bless us through them, and it would be ungrateful both to him and to them to pass them by as useless. But, while we use the ministries, *we must go beyond them*. The spouse did not find her Lord through the watchmen; but she says, 'it was but a little that I passed from them, that I found him whom my soul loveth.' I charge you, my dear hearers, never rest content with listening to me. Do not imagine that hearing the truth preached simply and earnestly will of itself be a blessing to your souls. Far, far beyond the servant, pass to the Master. Be this the longing of each heart, each Sabbath-day, 'Lord, give me fellowship with thyself.' True, we are led to see Jesus sometimes, and I hope often, through listening to the truth proclaimed, but, O Lord, it is no outer court worship that will satisfy us we want to come into the holy of holies and stand at the mercy-seat itself. It is no seeing thee afar off and hearing about thee that will content our spirits, we must draw nigh unto thee, and behold thee as the world cannot. Like Simeon, we must take thee into our arms or we cannot say that we have seen God's salvation: like

John, we must lean our heads upon the bosom or we cannot rest. Thine apostles are well enough, thy prophets well enough, thy evangelists well enough; but oh, we feel constrained to go beyond them all, for we thirst after fellowship with thee, our Savior. Those who feel thus will bless the church, but only such.

Note, that we must *search to the very utmost* till we find our Beloved. The Christian must leave no stone unturned till he gets back his fellowship with Christ. If any sin obstructs the way, it must be rigorously given up; if there be any neglected duty, it must be earnestly discharged; if there be any higher walk of grace, which is necessary to continuous fellowship, we must ascend it, fearing no hill of difficulty. We must not say, 'there is a lion in the way' if there be lions we must slay them; if the way be rough we must tread it; we must go on hands and knees if we cannot run; but we must reach to fellowship with Jesus; we must have Christ or pine till we do. Sacrifices we must make and penalties we must endure, but to Christ we must come, for we are feeble when we are absent from him, and quite incapable of rendering any great service to the church, till once for all we can say, 'I found him, I held him, and I would not let him go.' O dear brethren and sisters, I know there are some of you who can enter into what I mean; but I would to God there were many more to whom the first thought of life was Christ Jesus. Oh, for more Enochs, men who walk with God, whose habitual spirit is that of close communion with Jesus, meditating upon him, yea, more than that, sympathizing with him, drinking into his spirit, changed into his likeness, living over again his life, because he is in them the monarch of their souls. O that we had a chosen band of elect spirits of this race, for surely the whole church would be revived through their influence; God, even our own God, would bless us; and we should see bright, halcyon days dawning for the bride of Christ. Here, then, is the first point: we must find the Lord Jesus for ourselves, or we cannot bring him into our mother's house.

I would beg every believer here to ask himself a few questions, such as these: 'Am I walking in constant fellowship with Christ? If I am not, why not? Is it that I am worldly? Is it that I am proud, or indolent, or envious, or careless? Am I indulging myself in any sin? Is there anything whatever that divides me from Christ my Lord?' Let this be the resolution of every one of the Lord's people: 'From this time forth I will seek unto the Lord my Savior, and I will not be satisfied until I can say, 'I am coming up from the wilderness leaning upon the Beloved.'"

II. This brings us to the second point of the subject. If we would be a blessing to the church, and have already found Christ, WE MUST TAKE CARE TO RETAIN HIM. 'I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him, and I would not let him go.' From this I learn that in order to be of great use to the church of God, it is needful for those who commune with Christ to continue in that communion. How comparatively easy it is to climb to the top of Pisgah! It needs but a little effort; many bold and gracious spirits are fully equal to it. But to keep there, to abide in that mountain, this is the difficulty. To come to Christ, and to sit

down at his feet, is a simple thing enough for believers, and many of us have attained to it; but to sit day after day at the Master's feet is quite another matter. Oh, could I always be as I sometimes am! Could I not only rise above but remain there! But, alas, our spiritual nature is too much like this weather 'it is balmy to-day; one would think that spring or summer had come; but, perhaps, to-night we may be chilled with frost and tomorrow drenched with rain. Ah, how fickle are our spirits. We are walking with Christ, rejoicing, leaping for joy; and anon the cold frosts of worldliness come over us, and we depart from him. Ye will never be strong to impart great blessings to others till you cease to wander, and learn the meaning of that text: 'Abide in me.' Note well, it is not 'Look at me;' nor 'Come near to me, and then go away from me,' but 'Abide in me.' The branch does not leave the vine and then leap back again to the stock; you never saw a living branch of the vine roaming into the corners of the vineyard, or rambling over the wall; it abides in connection with the parent stem at all times, and even so should it be with the Christian.

Mark, that according to the text, it is very apparent that *Jesus will go away if he is not held*. 'I held him and I would not let him go;' as if he would have gone if he had not been firmly retained. When he met with Jacob that night at the Jabbok, he said, 'Let me go.' He would not go without Jacob's letting him, but he would have gone if Jacob had loosed his hold. The patriarch replied, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.' This is one of Christ's ways and manners; it is one of the peculiarities of his character. When he walked to Emmaus with the two disciples, 'he made as if he would have gone further:' they might have known it was none other than the Angel of the Covenant by that very habit. He would have gone further, but they constrained him, saying, 'Abide with us for the day is far spent.' If you are willing to lose Christ's company he is never intrusive, he will go away from you, and leave you till you know his value and begin to pine for him. 'I will go,' says he, 'and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' He will go unless you hold him.

But note, next, *he is very willing to be held*. Who could hold him if he were not? He is the omnipotent Savior, and if he willed to withdraw he could do so: let us hold him as we might. But, mark his condescension. When his spouse said, 'I held him, and I would not let him go,' he did not go, he could not go, for his love held him as well as her hands. Christ is willing to be held. He loves that sacred violence which takes him by force, that holy diligence which leaves not a gap open by which he may escape, but shuts every door, bars every bolt, and saith, 'I have thee now and I will take care that if I lose thee it shall be through no fault of mine.' Jesus is willing enough to be retained by hearts which are full of his love.

And, brethren, whenever you have Christ, please to remember that *you are able to hold him*. She who held him in the Song was no stronger than you are; she was but a feeble woman, poorly fed under the Old Testament dispensation; you have drunk the new wine of the new covenant, and you are stronger than she. You can hold him, and he will not be able to go

from you. 'How,' say you, 'shall I be able to hold him?' Oh, have you grasped him? Is he with you? Now, then, hold him fast by your faith; trust him implicitly, rest in him for every day's cares, for every moments. Walk by faith and he will walk with you. Hold him also with the grasp of love. Let your whole heart go out towards him. Embrace him with the arms of mighty affection, enchain him with ardent admiration. Lay hold upon him by faith, and clasp him with love. Be also much in prayer. Prayer casts a chain about him. He never leaves the heart that prays. There is a sweet perfume about prayer that always attracts the Lord; wherever he perceives it rising up to heaven there will he be. Hold him, too, by your obedience to him. Never quarrel with him. Let him have his way. He will stop in any house where he can be master; he will stay nowhere where some other will lords it over his. Watch his words; be careful to obey them all. Be very tender in your conduct, so that nothing grieves him. Show to him that you are ready to suffer for his sake. I believe that where there is a prayerful, careful, holy, loving, believing walk towards Jesus, the fellowship of the saint with his Lord will not be broken, but it may continue for months and years. There is no reason, except in ourselves, why fellowship with Jesus should not continue throughout an entire life and oh, if it did, it would make earth into heaven, and lift us up to the condition of angels, if not beyond them, and we should be the men who would bring Christ into the church, and through the church into the world. The church would be blest, and God would be glorified, and souls would be saved, if there were some among us who thus held him, and would not let him go.

I want to call your attention to one thought before I leave this, and that is, the spouse says, 'I held *him*.' Now, a great many persons in the world are holding their creed, and if it is a correct one I hope they will hold it; but that is the main business of their religious life; they do nothing else but hold this doctrine or that. Hold it, brother, hold it: it would be a pity you should let it go if it be the truth, but still it is more important to hold your Lord. Certain others are engrossed in holding scriptural ordinances, and saying, 'I hold this and I hold that.' Well, hold it brother; if it is God's ordinance do not let it go. But, after all, if there be anything I hold above all else, I hold *him*. Is not that the best grip a soul ever gets, when she lays hold of Christ? 'I held *him* and I would not let him go.' Ah, Lord, I may be mistaken about doctrine, but I am not mistaken about thee. I may, perhaps, be staggered in my belief of some dogma which I thought was truth, but I am not staggered about *thee*. Thou Son of God made flesh for me, thou art all my salvation and all my desire: I rest on thee only, without a shadow of mixture of any other hope, and I love thee supremely, desiring to honor thee and to obey thee in life and until death. I hold thee, thou Covenant Angel, and I will not let thee go.

Dear friends! make this the mark of your life, that you hold him and will not let him go. You will be the kind of men to bless the church by leading the Well-Beloved into her chambers, if you know how to abide in him yourselves.

III. It appears from the text that, after the spouse had thus found Christ for herself and held him, SHE BROUGHT HIM INTO THE CHURCH "I brought him to my mother's house." We ought lovingly to remember the church of God. By the Holy Spirit we were begotten unto newness of life, but it was in the church, and through the preaching of the word there that we were brought into the light of life. We owe our conversion, the most of us, to some earnest teacher of the truth in the church of God, or to some of those godly works which were written by Christian men. Through the church's instrumentality the Bible itself has been preserved to us, and by her the gospel has been preached to every age. She is our mother and we love her. I know that many of you, dear friends, the members of this church, love the church, and you can say, 'If I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning.' When you are away from this place, and cannot mix in our solemn assemblies, your heart mourns like one in banishment. Have not I heard you cry, 'Ziona, Ziona, our holy and beautiful house, wherein we have worshipped our God, the house which is built of living stones, among whom Christ himself is the corner-stone, even thy church, O Jesus: would God I were in her midst again, and could once more unite my praises with those that dwell within her.' Yes, and because we love our mother's house and the chamber of her that conceived us, we desire to bring Christ into the church more and more. Did I hear a harsh but honest voice exclaim, 'But, I find much fault with the church?' Brother, if thou lovest her, thou wilt go backward and cast a mantle over all. But, suppose thy candour is compelled to see faults in her; then there is so much the more need of her Lord's presence in her to cure those faults. The more sickly she is, the more she wants him to be her strength and her physician. I say, therefore, to thee, dear friend, above all things, seek to bring Christ into an imperfect church, and a weak church, and an erring church, that she may become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

I have shown you by whom it must be by those who have found him, and who hold him; and now we will mention the methods by which our blessed Lord can be brought into his church. The saints can bring him in by their *testimony*. I hope that often Christ is here when I have borne testimony to you of his power to save, of his atoning blood, of his exaltation in heaven, of the perfection of his character, and of his willingness to save. Many a Sabbath day his name has been like ointment poured forth in this place. Is there any subject that so delights you as that which touches upon Christ? Is not that the rarest string in all the harp of scriptural truth? Well, every true minister, by bearing witness for Christ, helps to bring him into the church.

But, others can do it by their *prayers*. There is a mysterious efficacy in the prayers of men who dwell near to God. Even if they were compelled to keep their beds, and do nothing but pray, they would pour benedictions upon the church. We want our dear sick friends to get well and come among us at once in full health; but I do not know, I do not know; they may be of more service to the church where they are. 'Ye that make mention of the Lord

keep not silence, and give him no rest day nor night, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.' Now, there were not some saints kept awake at night by sickness to pray, we should not so fully realize that word, 'Give him no rest day nor night.' Some of those dear ones, whose faces we miss from among us, keep up the perpetual ministry of intercession. Their incense of prayer goes up at all hours; when the most of us are rightly enough at sleep they are compelled to wake, and therefore are led still to pray. How many blessings come down upon the church of God through the prayers of his feeble saints it is not possible for us to tell; but I believe if all of us were to set apart a special time for praying and pleading with Christ that he would come into his church, we should not be long before we saw a wonderful effect resulting from those pleadings. Wrestling prayers bring Christ into the innermost chambers of the church of God. Let us try the power of prayer.

And, there is no doubt, dear brethren, that Christ is often brought into the church by the *example* of those eminent saints who abide in Christ. You know what I mean. There is a very manner and air about some Christian men which honors Christ, and benefits his people. They may not be gifted in speech, but their very spirit speaks, they are so gentle, loving, tender, earnest, truthful, upright, gracious. Their paths, like the paths of God himself, drop fatness. They are the anointed of the Lord, and you perceive it. Perhaps you could not say that this virtue or that is very prominent, but it is the altogether; it is their life at home, their life in public, their church life, their private life, their entire conduct makes you see that the Holy Ghost is in them, and when they come into the church they bring the Spirit of God with them, and are thus a great means of blessing to all with whom they associate. I do pray, brethren, that in some way or other, each one of us may try to bring Jesus Christ into the midst of his own people. I am afraid there are some who on the contrary are driving him away' church members that, instead of blessing the church, are a curse to it. I see a great heap before me a vast heap that God has gathered through my instrumentality; but the winnowing fan is going, and the chaff is flying. Are you, dear friends, among the chaff or the wheat? Are you seed for the sower, or fuel for the flame unquenchable? Oh! live near to Christ; live in Christ; may Christ live in you; then will you enrich the church of God; but if you do not, but only make a profession of love with your lips, what shall I say unto you? I mourn over you. Take heed of living a weak life a life without God in it a life without Christ in it a life which a Pharisee might live. Seek to live the life of a trueborn child of God, lest you hinder the church's usefulness, and deprive her of her Lord's presence.

IV. This leads me to the last point, which is this, to CHARGE THE CHURCH THAT SHE BE CAREFUL NOT TO DISTURB THE LORD'S REPOSE, if we have been enabled by divine grace to bring the Lord into the chambers of our mother's house. 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.' Observe, then, that *the Lord Jesus in his church is not indifferent to the conduct of his people*. We are not to suppose that because the sin of all God's

elect is pardoned, therefore it is of small consequence how they live. By no manner of means. The Master of this great house is not blind nor deaf, neither is he a person who is utterly careless as to how the house is managed; on the contrary, as God is a jealous God, so is Christ a jealous husband to his church. He will not tolerate in her what he would tolerate in the world. She lies near his heart, and she must be chaste to him. What a solemn work the Lord did in the early church. That story of Ananias and Sapphira it is often used most properly to illustrate the danger of lying; but that is not the point of the narrative. Ananias and Sapphira were members of the church at Jerusalem, and they lied not unto men, which would have been sin enough, but in lying to the church officers they lied unto God, and the result was their sudden death. Now, you are not to suppose that this was a solitary case. Wherever there is a true church of God, the judgments of God are always going on in it. I speak now not only what I have read, but what I have known and seen with mine eyes; what I am as sure of as I am sure of any fact in history. The apostle Paul, speaking of the same in his day, said that in a certain church there was so much sin that many were weak and sickly among them, and many slept; that is to say, there was great sickness in the church, and many died. Judgments are begun in the house of God and are always going on there. I have seen men in the church who have walked at a distance from God, who have been visited with severe chastisements; others who have been of hot and proud spirit, have been terribly humbled; and some who have arrogantly touched God's ark, and the doom of Uzzah has befallen them. I have seen it and do know it. And so it always will be. The Lord Jesus Christ looking around his church, if he sees anything evil in it, will do one of two things; either he will go right away from his church because the evil is tolerated there, and he will leave that church to be like Laodicea, to go on from bad to worse, till it becomes no church at all; or else he will come and he will trim the lamp, or to use the figure of the fifteenth of John, he will prune the vinebranch and with his knife will cut off this member, and the other, and cast them into the fire; while, as for the rest, he will cut them till they bleed again, because they are fruit-bearing members, but they have too much wood, and he wants them to bring forth more fruit. It is not a trifling matter to be in the church of God. God's fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem. 'His fan is in his hand, and he shall thoroughly purge' what? The world. O no, 'his floor,' the church. And then, again, 'he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify' what? The heathen nations. No, 'the sons of Levi' his own people. So that Christ is not indifferent to what is going on in the church, and it is needful that when he comes to the church to take his repose, and solace himself there, we should not stir him up nor awake him till he please.

But many things will drive our Lord away, and these shall have our closing words. Dear fellow members of this church, may we each one be more watchful lest the Bridegroom should withdraw from us. He will go away if we grow proud. If we are boastful, and say, 'There is some reason why God should bless us,' and should begin to speak hectoringly to-

wards weaker brethren, the Lord will let us know that 'not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name shall be all the glory.'

Again, if there be a want of love among us, the Lord of love will be offended. The holy dove loves not scenes of strife; he frequents the calm still waters of brotherly love. There the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore, where brethren dwelt together in unity. If any of you have half a hard thought towards another, get rid of it; if there be the beginnings of anything like jealousy, quench the sparks. 'Leave off strife,' says Solomon, 'before it be meddled with,' as if he said, 'End it before you begin it,' which, though it seems strangely paradoxical, is most wise advice. 'Little children love one another.' 'Walk in love as Christ also has loved us.' May discord be far from us.

Notice the beautiful imagery of the text. 'I charge you by the roes and the hinds of the field.' In ancient times gazelles were often tamed, and were the favourite companions of Eastern ladies: the gazelle might be standing near its mistress, fixing its loving eyes upon her, but if a stranger clapped his hands it would hasten away. The roes and hinds '*of the field*' are even yet more jealous things, a sound will startle them, even the breath of the hunter tainting the gale puts them to speedy flight. Even thus is it with Jesus. A little thing, a very little thing, will drive him from us, and it may be many a day before our repentance shall be able to find him again. He has suffered so much from sin that he cannot endure the approach of it. His pure and holy soul abhors the least taint of iniquity.

Let us gather from the text that there are some things in the true church which give our Lord rest. He is represented here as though he slept in the church, 'That ye stir not up nor awake my love till he please.' Wherever he sees true repentance, real faith, holy consecration, purity of life, chastity of love, there Christ rests. I believe he finds no sweeter happiness even in heaven than the happiness of accepting his people's prayers and praises. Our love is very sweet to him; our deeds of gratitude are very precious, the broken alabaster boxes of self-sacrifices done for him are very fair in his esteem. He finds no rest in the world, he never did; but he finds sweet rest on the bosoms of his faithful ones. He loves to come into a pure church, and there to say, 'I am at home. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.'

Let us be very watchful, too, against all impurity. Anything like uncleanness in a Christian will soon send the Master away from the church. You know what it was that brought the evil upon the house of Eli. It was because his sons made themselves vile even at the tabernacle door. The young people in that case were the immediate cause of the mischief, but it was the fault of the elder ones that they restrained them not. Watch against all evil passions and corrupt desires. Be ye holy even as your Father which is in heaven is holy.

And then, again, a want of prayer will send him away. There are members of some churches who never come to the prayer-meetings, and I should be afraid that their private prayers cannot be any too earnest. Of course we speak not of those who have good excuse;

but there are some who habitually and wilfully neglect the assembling of themselves together; these are worthy of condemnation. Oh, let us continue a prayerful church as we have hitherto been, otherwise the Master may say, 'They do not value the blessing, for they will not even ask for it; they evidently do not care about my Spirit, for they will not meet together and cry for him.' Do not grieve him by any such negligence of prayer.

So, too, we may grieve the Spirit by worldliness. If any of you who are rich get to imitate the fashions of the world and act as worldlings do, you cannot expect the Lord to bless us. You are Achans in the camp, if such is the case. And if you who are poor get to be envious of others and speak harshly of others to whom God has given more substance than to you, that again will grieve the Lord. You know how the children of Israel in the wilderness provoked him, and their provocation mostly took the form of murmuring; they complained of this and of that: if they had the manna they wanted flesh, and if they had water gushing from the rock they must needs have more. I pray you by the bowels of mercies that are in Christ Jesus, by all the compassion he has manifested towards us, by the high love he deserves of us, since he laid down his life for us, by your allegiance to him as your King, by your trust in him as your Savior, by your love to him as the Bridegroom of your souls, 'stir not up nor awake my love till he please.'

Let me ask you to be more in prayer; let me pray you to live nearer to him; let me entreat you for the church's sake, and for the world's sake, to be more thoroughly Christ's than you ever have been and may the power of the Holy Spirit enable you in this. I do not fear lest I should lose that which I have wrought, for God will establish the work of our hands upon us, but yet I do put up to him daily the prayer that this church may not be found in years to come to be a building of wood, and hay, and stubble, that shall be consumed in the fire of heresy or discord, or some other testing flame which God may suffer to come upon it; but oh, may you, my beloved brethren and sisters, be gold, and silver, and precious stones, that the workman at the last, saved himself, may not have to suffer loss, nor the Master be dishonored in the eyes of men. May you stand as a sparkling pile of precious gems, inhabited by the eternal Spirit, to the praise and the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON'John 15; Solomon's [Song 3](#).