

Loved and Loving

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AMONG THE GOLDEN APPLE TREES,

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"My Beloved is mine, and I am His: He feeds among the lilies." Song of Solomon 2:16.

"MY BELOVED"—this is a sweet name which our love takes liberty to apply to the Lord Jesus. His inexpressible beauty has won our affection and we cannot help loving Him whatever may come of it—whether He is ours or not and whether He smiles upon us or frowns—we love Him and cannot do otherwise. We are carried away by the torrent of His goodness and have no longer the control of our affections. As long as we live, we must and will love the Altogether Lovely One. Yes, He is and must be to me, "My Beloved."

BUT suppose—suppose for a moment that we loved and had no right to love? Many a heart that has cried, "My Beloved," has been wounded even unto death because it could not come at its choice, but was doomed never to exclaim, "My Beloved is mine." The beloved was longed for but could not be grasped. This is often so in earthly love, since such love may be unlawful, or unwise, and in every case it is the source of grievous misery. Thank God, this is not the case with the soul enamored of Christ Jesus, for He freely presents Himself in the Gospel as the Object of our confidence and love! Though He is infinitely above us, yet He delights to be one with all His loving ones—and of His own will He gives Himself to us.

A polluted sinner may love the perfect Savior, for there is no word in Scripture to forbid. Yes, if a sinner would be wedded to the Lord of Glory, there is none to forbid it. Suppose that our possession of Jesus were a matter of doubt, as, alas, it is with far too many? That would be a door of sorrow, indeed. Life would be unhappy if it were soured by a question as to whether our Well-Beloved is ours or not. To an awakened and instructed mind it is anguish to be dubious of our hold of Christ—about this we must be sure, or be unhappy. All else may be in jeopardy, but, O most blessed Lord, never allow our possession of Yourself to be in dispute! It would be a poor thing to say, "My beloved may be mine," or even, "He was mine," or, "perhaps He is mine." We cannot bear any verb but one in the indicative mood, present tense—"My beloved is mine."

Suppose yet, once again, that though we loved, and rightly loved, and actually possessed the beloved object, yet our affection was not returned. Ah, misery! To love and not be loved! Blessed be God, we can not only sing, "My Beloved is mine," but also, "I am His!" He values me, He delights in me, He loves me! It is very wonderful that Jesus should think us worth the having but since He does, we find a matchless solace in the fact! Which is the greater miracle—that He should be mine, or that I should be His? Certainly, the second is the surer

ground of safety, for I cannot keep my treasures, since I am feebleness itself! But Jesus is able to preserve His own and none can pluck them out of His hands.

The truth that Jesus calls me His is enough to make a man dance and sing all the way between here and Heaven! Realize the fact that we are dear to the heart of our Incarnate God and amid the sands of this wilderness a fountain of overflowing joy is open before us!

THE TEXT IS FREE FROM ALL SUPPOSITION—it is the language of indisputable possession, the exclamation of a confidence which has made its assurance doubly sure! There are two positive verbs in the present tense and not the smell of a doubt has passed upon them. Here is a brave positiveness which fears no controversy, "my Beloved is mine and I am His." Doubt it who may, no, if you must doubt it, ask Him! There He is, for, "He feeds among the lilies." The spouse sees Him of whom she speaks. He may be a mere myth to others but He is a substantial, lovable, lovely and actually beloved Person to her!

He stands before her and she perceives His Character so clearly that she has a comparison ready for Him and likens Him to a gazelle feeding on the tender grass among the lilies. This is a very delightful state of heart. Some of us know what it is to enjoy it from year to year. Christ is ours and we know it. Jesus is present and, by faith, we see Him. Our marriage union with husband or wife cannot be more clear, more sure, more matter of fact than our oneness with Christ and

our enjoyment of that oneness! Joy! Joy! JOY! He whom we love is ours! We can also see the other side of the golden shield, for He whom we prize beyond all the world also prizes us and we are His! Nothing in the universe deserves, for an instant, to be compared in value with this inestimable blessing!

We would not change with the cherubim—their chief places in the choirs of Heaven are poor as compared with the glory which excels—the glory of knowing that I am my best Beloved's and He is mine! A place in Christ's heart is more sweet, more honorable, more dear to us than a throne among the angels! Not even the delights of Paradise can produce a rival to this ecstatic joy—"My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

YET THE TEXT HAS A NOTE OF CAUTION. The condition of fully assured love is as tender as it is delightful. The spouse, in the seventh verse, had charged her companions by all things of gentleness, delicacy and timidity—"by the roes and by the hinds of the field"—to refrain from offending her Beloved while He deigned to abide with her. She had also compared Him to a roe or a young hart, rather hiding than revealing Himself, and here she likens Him to the same roe, quietly pasturing in the gardens, so gently moving that He does not break or even bruise a lily, but softly insinuates Himself among their delicate beauties as one of the same dainty mold.

This hints, in poetic imagery, at the solemn and sacred Truth of God that the dearest fellowship with Jesus can never be known by the rough and the coarse, the hard and the restless, but remains the priceless heritage of the lowly and meek. And these can only retain

it by a studious care which cherishes love and guards it from even the least intrusion. A gazelle among the lilies would start at the bark of a fox and be gone at the voice of a stranger. And, therefore, soft whispers of inward love must say, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes," and nimble hands with noiseless fingers must draw up the lattice that kindly eyes may look forth at the windows and may be seen of Him who delights in love.

The evident intent of the language is to set forth the delicacy of the highest form of holy fellowship. The Lord our God is a jealous God and that jealousy is most seen where most His love is displayed. The least sin, willfully indulged in, will grieve the Holy Spirit. Sights, forgetfulnesses and neglects will cause Him to turn away. If we would remain positively and joyously assured that the Beloved is ours and that we are His, we must use the utmost circumspection and holy vigilance. No man gains full assurance by accident, or retains it by chance. As the gentle hind wanders in lovely spots where the pure white lilies grow and as he shuns the places profaned by strife and foul with rank weeds and nettles, so does the Lord Jesus come to holy minds perfumed with devotion and consecrated to the Lord—and there, in sacred quiet—He finds solace and abides with His saints.

May the Lord preserve us from pride, from self-seeking, from carnality and wrath, for these things will chase away our delights even as dogs drive off the hind of the morning! Both our inward and outward walk must be eagerly watched lest anything should vex the Bridegroom. A word, a glance, a thought may break the spell and end the happy rest of the heart—and it may be a long while before the blessing is regained. We have, some of us, learned by bitter experience that it is difficult to establish a settled peace and easy enough to destroy it. The costly vase, the product of a thousand laborious processes, may be broken in a moment! And so the supreme delight of communion with the Lord Jesus, the flower of 10,000 eminent delights, may be shattered by a few moments' negligence.

Hence the one lesson of our little sermon is—I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my Love, till He please"—

"For I am jealous of my heart Lest it should once from Him depart. Then should I lose my best delight Should my Beloved take to flight."

Mentone, December 10, 1881. BELOVED FRIENDS—In a few days I hope to turn my face homeward, much refreshed by laying aside the harness for a season. I beseech you continue your prayers for me—prayer which I value beyond all earthly treasures. If these sermons profit you, ask that I may have Grace to continue them. Entering upon a 27th volume, I entreat your help to increase their circulation, that they may have a wider range of influence. Yours heartily, C. H. SPURGEON.