

The Incomparable Bridegroom and His Bride

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A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 23, 1896.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"What is your Beloved more than another beloved, O you fairest among women? What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?" Song of Solomon 5:9.

THIS morning, [See sermon # 694, Volume 12, "Sin Laid on Jesus."] we had the great privilege of preaching the doctrine of Substitution and of directing the minds of God's people to the solid rock of the meritorious Sacrifice of Christ whereon all their hopes of Heaven must be built. What we have to say, tonight, is less doctrinal and more practical—therefore let us guard ourselves at the outset. If we should, with very much earnestness, urge Believers to good works, let nobody suppose that, therefore, we imagine that men are saved by works! Let no one, for a moment, dream that in urging the Believer to bring forth fruit to righteousness, we are at all teaching that salvation is the work of man! I have no doubt that all of us who know anything of true religion are of the same opinion as that celebrated Scotch Divine, old David Dickson, who was asked, when dying, what was the principal subject on which his thoughts were engaged. He answered, "I am gathering up all my good works and all my bad works, tying them into one bundle and throwing them all, alike, down at the foot of the Cross and am resting alone upon the finished work of Jesus."

It is related of that mighty master in Israel, James Durham, that his experience at the last was very much akin to that of his friend, Dickson, for he said, "Notwithstanding all my preaching and all my spiritual experiences, I do not know that I have anything to hang upon excepting this one sentence spoken by Christ, 'Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" "Ah," replied someone who stood by Mr. Durham at the time, "you might well hazard a thousand souls, if you had them, upon the strength of that one precious text."

Having said so much by way of caution, I want to address some earnest words to the people of God upon certain practical Truths of God that arise out of our text. And the first thing I have to say is this, that the daughters of Jerusalem recognized in the spouse an exceeding beauty which dazzled and charmed them, so that they could not help calling her the "fairest among women." This was not her estimate of herself, for she had said, "I am black, but comely." Nor was it the estimate of her enemies, for they had struck and wounded her. But it was the estimate of fair, candid and impartial onlookers.

I. This leads me to remark, first, that OUR CHARACTER SHOULD GIVE WEIGHT TO OUR PROFESSION OF RELIGION.

You will observe that it was in consequence of thinking her the "fairest among women" that they asked the spouse, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" They thought that one so fair might well have her choice of a Bridegroom, that one so lovely would be likely to have an eye to loveliness in her Husband and, consequently, they considered her judgment to be worth some attention—and so they put to her the question why her Beloved was more than another beloved. Take it for granted, dear Friends, as a truth which your own observation and experience will make every day more and more clear, that your power to spread religion in the world must mainly depend upon your own personal character, but, of course, in absolute reliance upon the Holy Spirit! I suppose it is the earnest wish of every Christian to win for Christ some new converts, to bring some fresh province under the dominion of the King of Kings. I will tell you how this may be accomplished.

Your power to achieve this noble purpose must largely depend upon your own personal consistency. It little matters what I say if I do the reverse! The world will not care about my testimony with my lips unless there is also a testimony in my daily life for God, for truth, for holiness, for everything that is honest, lovely, pure and of good report. There is that in a Christian's character which the world, though it may persecute the man, himself, learns to value. It is called consistency—that is, the making of the life stand together—not being one thing in one place and another thing in another, or one thing at one time and quite different on another occasion. It is not consistency to be devout on Sunday and to be dishonest on Monday! It is not consistency to sing the songs of Zion, today, and to shout the songs of lustful mirth tomorrow. It is not consistency to occasionally wear the yoke of Christ and yet frequently to make yourself the serf of Satan! But to make your life all of a piece is to make it powerful and when God the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, then your testimony will be noticed upon those among whom you live.

It would be ludicrous, if it were not so sorrowful a thing to be spoken of, even with weeping, that there should be professed Christians who are, through inconsistency, among the worst enemies of the Cross of Christ! I heard, the other day, a story which made me laugh. A poor creature, in a lunatic asylum, had got it into his head that he was some great one and he addressed a person who was visiting the asylum in the following words—"I am Sir William Wallace. Give me some tobacco!" What a ridiculous contrast between his proud assertion and his poor request! Who but a lunatic would have said such a thing?

Yet, alas, we know people who say, by their actions, if not in words, "I am a Christian, but I will take advantage of you when I can. I am one of the blood-royal of Heaven, my life is hid with Christ in God and my conversation is in Heaven, but—but—I like worldliness, sensual pleasure and carnal mirth quite as well as other men!" I say again that this kind of thing would be superlatively ludicrous if it were not ineffably sorrowful, and it is, anyhow, utterly contemptible. If your life is not all of a piece, the world will soon learn how to estimate your testimony and will count you to be either a fool or a knave, or, perhaps, both!

But it is not enough to be barely consistent—what the world expects in Christians is real holiness as well as consistency. Holiness is something more than virtue. Virtue is like goodness frozen into ice, hard and cold. But holiness is that same goodness when it is thawed into a clear, running, sparkling stream. Virtue is the best thing that philosophy can produce, but holiness is the true fruit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of that, alone! There must be about us an un-worldliness, a something out of the common and ordinary way, or else, mark you, that uncommon Gospel, that heavenly Gospel which we hold, will not seem to be bringing forth its legitimate fruit. If you are just barely honest and no more. If you are barely moral and no more—it is of no service that you should try to speak of Christ—the world will not reckon you as the fairest among women and it will not enquire anything about your Well-Beloved!

But, Brothers and Sisters, I feel as if, instead of exhorting you thus, I might better turn to confession, myself, and ask you to join me in confessing how far short we come of being anything like the fairest among women as to character. We hope that we have something Christ-like about us, but oh, how little it is! How many imperfections there are! How much is there of the old Adam and how little of the new creature in Christ Jesus! Archbishop Usher was once asked to write a treatise upon Sanctification. This he promised to do, but six months rolled away and the good Archbishop had not written a sentence. He said to a friend, "I have not begun the treatise, yet I cannot confess to a breach of my promise, for, to tell you the truth, I have done my best to write upon the subject, but when I came to look into my own heart, I saw so little of sanctification there, and found that so much which I could have written would have been merely by rote as a parrot might have talked, that I had not the courage to write it." Yet, if ever there was a man renowned for holiness, it was Archbishop Usher! If ever there was a saintly man who seemed to be one of the seraphic spirits permitted to stray beyond the companionship of his kind among poor earthworms here, it was Usher! Yet this is the confession that he makes concerning himself!

Where, then, shall we hide our diminished heads? I am sure we may all say, with good Mr. Fletcher, of Madeley, who was another bright example of seraphic holiness, that what we need is more Divine Grace. He had written a pamphlet on some political matter and Lord North wrote to know what he could give him in return. His answer was, "I need what Your Lordship cannot give me—more Grace." That is also true of us—we need more Grace. It is to be had and if we had it, and it transformed us into what we should be, oh, what lives of happiness and of holiness we might lead here below! And what mighty workers would we be for our Lord Jesus Christ! How would His dear name be made to sound to the utmost ends of the earth! I fear it is but a dream—but just conceive that all of you, the members of this Church, were made to be truly saintly—saints of the first water, saints who had cast off the sloth of worldliness and had come out in the full glory of newness of life in Christ Jesus! Oh, what a power might this Church become in London! And what a power to be felt the

wide world over! Let us seek it. Let us strive after it, remembering that it is a truth never to be denied, that only in proportion to the sanctity and spirituality of our character will our influence be for good among the sons of men!

II. Advancing now a step, our second remark will be that WE SHOULD CHARGE OTHERS CONCERNING

CHRIST. "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us?"

The "fairest among women" was asked why she had so spoken—"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him that I am sick with love." By this, "charge," is meant, I suppose, that the spouse commanded them and spoke solemnly to them about her Beloved. Christians, be troublesome to the world! O house of Israel, be like a burdensome stone to the world! You are not sent here to be recognized as honorable citizens of this world, to be petted and well-treated! Even Christ, Himself, the Peaceable One, said, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled?" What I mean is this—we are not to be quiet about our religion! The world says to us, "Hold your tongue about religion, or at least talk about it at proper times. But do not introduce it at all seasons so as to become a pest and a nuisance." I say again and you know in what sense I mean it, be a nuisance to the world! Be such a man that worldlings will be compelled to feel that there is a Christian in their midst!

An officer was walking out of the royal presence on one occasion when he tripped over his sword. The king said to him, "Your sword is rather a nuisance." "Yes," was the officer's reply, "Your Majesty's enemies have often said so." May you be a nuisance to the world in that sense—troublesome to the enemies of the King of Kings! While your conduct should be courteous and everything that could be desired as between man and man, yet let your testimony for Christ be given without any flinching and without any mincing of the matter!

This afternoon I was reading a sermon by a certain Divine whose subject of discourse was why the working classes do not go to a place of worship and the preacher seems to have made up his mind that whatever is preached in this Tabernacle is especially obnoxious to laboring men and women. The reason he gives why the working classes do not attend places of worship is that we preach such dreadful doctrines! It is very remarkable that places where these Truths of God are preached, are crowded, while places where the opposite things are proclaimed are often empty! It is curious, if the doctrine of the Gospel is such a very horrible thing that it drives people away, that at the places where it is preached, there are more people than can get in, whereas where some of the modern doctrines are declared, you may see more spiders than people! It is an amazing circumstance, certainly, yet one for which we can easily account.

A Socinian minister was once asked by one who preached Evangelical Truth, "If I, who proclaim doctrines which you say are obnoxious to common reason, have my place full, and you, who preach such pretty, reasonable doctrines, can get nobody to hear you, do you

not think it is because the people have an idea that what I teach is true—and that what you preach, though it is very pleasant and palatable, is not true and, therefore—they do not care to hear it?" It is not by altering our testimony that we are to hope to win an audience—and it is not by hiding the Light of the Gospel under a bushel that you or I shall discharge our obligations to our Lord! We must speak up for Christ and so speak up for Him that men will be moved to ask us the question, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us?"

I have read that Mr. Kilpin, of Exeter, had every pew in the chapel where he preached sketched out on a plan and the names of all the occupants of the pews written on it, so that he might pray for everyone and, if possible, speak to everyone. Such a plan might not be practicable in so large a building as this, but it is an excellent method, but if we cannot adopt it, let this place be mapped out in your own minds and let every Believer, wherever he sits, consider that there is a little district allotted to him and let him seek to have a word of courteous Christian conversation about Divine things with all who sit near him! I suggest this as a very excellent mode of beginning to "charge" others about Christ. And then, in your daily business, in the workshop, at fit times and seasons, at periods when Christian prudence and Christian zeal would give their voice together, introduce Christ and begin to talk of Him and hold Him up as the great cure-all for human diseases, the great staff and support for human weakness! We shall never see as much blessing as we might until the work of the Church becomes far more general than it is at present.

There is something which every Believer can do for his Lord. He must be able to tell of what he has tasted and handled of the Word of Life—and if he has not tasted and handled it—then he is not a child of God at all. The best teaching in the world is experimental—nothing wins upon men like personal witnessing—not merely teaching the doctrine as we find it in the Book, but as we have felt it in its living power upon our own hearts! When we begin to tell of its effect upon ourselves, it is amazing what power there is upon others in that testimony! A person talks to me about a certain medicine, how it is compounded, what it looks like, how many drops must be taken at a dose and so on. Well, I do not care to hear all that and I soon forget it. But he tells me that for many months he was bed-ridden, he was in sore distress and in great pain and almost died. And, looking at him as he stands before me in perfect health, I am delighted with the change—and he says that it was that medicine which restored him. If I am a sick man in the same state as he was, I say to him, "Give me the name and address, for I must try that medicine myself."

I believe that the simple witness of converted boys and girls, converted lads and lasses, especially the witness of converted fathers and mothers and beloved friends—the witness that comes of the gray head that is backed up by years of godly living has a wonderful power for the spread of the Gospel! But we cannot expect that God will give us a very large blessing until the whole of us shall be at work for our Lord. We need not all climb up the pulpit stairs,

but each one of us can proclaim Christ according to our ability and according to the circumstances in which He has placed us. When we shall do that, then we may expect to see "greater things than these"—days that will make us laugh for joy of heart—and well-near make us dance like David did before the Ark will come when all the rank and file of the army—and even those who halt upon their crutches—shall march unanimously against the foe!

III. Thirdly, it is important for us to MAKE ALL WHO COME IN CONTACT WITH US FEEL THAT CHRIST JESUS IS FIRST AND FOREMOST WITH US.

You perceive that the question of the text is not, "What is your Beloved that He should be equal to others?" It is, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" The idols of the heathen are all made to stand in the Pantheon, face to face, and there is no quarrelling among them. But as soon as you introduce Christ, they must all go down, or He will not stay. The principle of the toleration of every form of doctrine—I mean not, of course, civil toleration which we hold to be always necessary and right, but I mean mental toleration—the principle of the mental toleration of all forms of doctrine and all forms and shades of action, is heathenish, for where Christ comes, He comes to reign, and when once He enters the soul of a man, it is down, down, down with everything else!

There is a text which is often misunderstood. I heard it read thus only last Sunday—"No man can serve two masters." I very much question whether he cannot! I believe he could serve not only two, but twenty! That is not the meaning of the text—the true reading of it is, "No man can serve two masters." They cannot both be masters. If two of them are equal, then neither of them is really master. It is not possible for the soul to be subject to two master passions. If a man says, "I love Christ," that is well. But if he says, "I love Christ and I love money—and I love them both supremely"—that man is a liar, for the thing is not possible! There is only one that can be the master passion and when Jesus enters the soul, love to Him must be the master passion of the heart!

It strikes me that a Christian, living fully up to his privileges, would be such a man as this—if he had, on one side, the opportunity to enjoy pleasure and, on the other side, a painful opportunity of honoring Christ—he would prefer to honor Christ rather than to enjoy himself. If, on the one hand, there were gain, even lawfully to be had, and on the other hand, Christ could be honored in a way that would bring no monetary gain, the man would prefer the glorifying of his Master to the obtaining of the advantage in cash which was held out to him. And if it comes to this, that by soft speeches he may get himself into good repute, but that by sternly speaking out and rebuking error he may honor his Master but bring much contempt upon himself—if he is a genuine Christian—he will always take the latter course! The first question he will ask will be, "How can I most honor my Lord? How can I best glorify Him?"

It is clear that Christ is not first in every nominal Christian's heart. No, alas, He is not first and He is not even second! He is very far down in the scale. Look at them—good honest trades people, perhaps, but from the first dawn of Monday morning to the putting up of the shutters on Saturday night, what is the main business of their life? It is only, "What shall we eat?" Or, "What shall we drink?" Or, "With what shall we be clothed?" Now, where is Christ in such a case as that? Look at others—with them the question is, "Where shall I invest such-and-such an amount of spare cash? How shall I best lay by such-and-such a sum? What field shall I buy next? What house shall I add to my estate?" As for the Lord Jesus, He is put off with the cheese-parings and the candle-ends—He gets a little, now and then, dropped into the offering box, but it is only a mere trifle compared with what He ought to receive. The man's words are 999 for himself and, perhaps, not much more than half a one for Christ. Almost all his time goes to the world and not to his Lord—his whole self goes to himself, and not to the Savior to whom he professes to belong!

This is not the case with the truly Christ-like man. With him, Christ is first, Christ is last, Christ is midst, Christ is All in All—and when he speaks about anything connected with Christ, his words come with such a solemn earnestness that men are impressed with what he says. And they turn round to him and ask, as the daughters of Jerusalem enquired of the spouse, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us?"

IV. Our last thought is this—if ever, through the Grace of God, we should possess such a character and bear such a testimony as we have been talking about, so that men shall ask us the question of the text—IT WILL BE WELL FOR US TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER IT.

This is an age in which the world asks many questions, but from some Christians it cannot get an answer. I will say one thing which some of you may not like to hear, perhaps, but I cannot help it. There are some of you who are Bap-tists—but why? Well, I suppose, because you happen to be one and you have followed me without carefully studying the teaching of the New Testament upon the question. I fear it is so with some of you. And there are others of you who are Wesleyans, or Independents, or church people, but the only reason you can give for being so is that your grandmother, or your mother happened to be of that denomination. This is an age in which people do not estimate the Truth of God as they should! A good earnest controversy seems to me to be a very healthy thing because it turns men's attention somewhat more than usual to Divine things—but you know how it is—even with many professing Christian people—they think it would be wicked to read a novel, but if it is written upon a religious subject, then it is a very proper thing! There is hardly a weekly newspaper, nowadays, or even a penny magazine that can live without having a novel in it—and there must be a market for all this rubbish or it would not be supplied so plentifully! Why, Sirs, in Puritan times, men read solid books like John Owen's, "On the Mortification of Sin." They studied such works as Richard Gilpin's, "On Satan's

Temptations," or Stephen Charnock's, "The Divine Attributes." But in these days, people who ought to read these solid books so as to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them, are often wasting their time over poor stuff which only addles the brain and does the soul no good!

I would to God that we could again see a race of sturdy Believers who would hold to nothing but what they had tested by the Word of God! Believers who would receive nothing merely because it was taught by their minister, or by their parents, or by any human authority, but who would accept with unquestioning faith everything that is revealed in the Inspired Book! Our motto should still be, "To the Law and to the Testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light of God in them." We need to breed, again—and oh, may God give us Grace to do so—a race of men who shall be rooted and grounded in the faith and who, when they are asked for a reason for the hope that is in them, shall be able to give it—not with fear and trembling and hesitation—but with holy boldness and determination because they have tested and tried the matter for themselves!

See how the spouse does—she does not pause a minute before she gives her reply. She is asked, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" And she has the answer, as we say, at her fingertips, and why was this? Why, because she had it in her heart! So she says, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand." She does not say, "Wait a bit, I must read up on that question. I must get myself well-instructed upon it." It is such a vital point and one so dear to her, as it touches the Person of her Lord, that she answers at once, "Is my Beloved better than any other beloved? Certainly He is and here are the reasons." She puts them together, one after another, without a pause, so that the daughters of Jerusalem must have been convinced. And I commend her example to you, also, my Beloved in Christ Jesus! Study the Word, that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God!

I beseech you, if I have taught you anything that is not revealed in the Scriptures, or if you have received anything only as by my authority, give it up until you have tested and tried it by the Word of the Lord! I am not afraid what the result will be, for if in anything I have erred, I pray the Lord to teach me and also to teach you, so that we may grow together in the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of the faith. Let us all seek to be taught of God and then, with a holy life added to this Divine instruction—and a clear testimony for Jesus Christ constantly borne by us—our witnessing will tell upon the age in which we live!

Oh, that the Lord would send us times of true revival once again! Run your finger down the page of history till you come to the Reformation—what was there in Luther, in Calvin, in Zwingli—that they should have been able to shake the world any more than there is in men who are living nowadays? Nothing but this—that the Reformers believed what they believed and they spoke with an awful earnestness, like men who meant what they said—and straightway there arose a noble race of men—men who felt the power of faith and lived it

out! And the world was made to feel that "there were giants in those days." Then, again, in later times, when the Church had fallen into a fatal slumber, there came the age of Whitefield and Wesley. What was the power of the early Methodists? Why, simply the power of true sincerity combined with holiness! What if I say that it was the power of intruding religion upon men, of forcing men to hear God's voice, of compelling a sleeping world to wake out of its slumbers?

As I sat, last week, in the hall of the Free Church Assembly in Edinburgh, just beneath the Castle, I started in my seat! I thought the whole hall was going to fall, for at one o'clock the gun on the Castle was fired from Greenwich by electricity! It startled every one of us and I noticed that nearly everybody took out his watch to see whether it was right by the gun. I thought to myself, "That is just what the Christian Church ought to do. It ought, at the proper time, to give a loud, clear, thundering testimony for God and for Truth, so that every man might examine his own conscience and get himself put right where he is wrong." Our testimony for Christ ought not to be like the ticking of an ordinary clock, or as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, but a mighty booming noise that commands and that demands a hearing! Let our soul be but linked with Heaven—let the Spirit of the Lord flash the message along the wires—and our life may be just as accurate and just as startling as that gun at Edinburgh! So, when men ask us, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us?" we shall have an answer ready for them, which may God bless to them, for Christ's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—386, 807, 802.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: SONG OF SOLOMON 1.

We will, this evening, read in the one Book of the Bible which is wholly given up to fellowship. I allude to the Book of Canticles. This Book stands like the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden and no man shall ever be able to pluck its fruit, and eat thereof, until first he has been brought by Christ past the sword of the cherubim, and led to rejoice in the love which has delivered him from death! The Song of Solomon is only to be comprehended by the men whose standing is within the veil. The outer-court worshippers and even those who only enter the court of the priests think the Book a very strange one, but they who some very near to Christ can often see in this Song of Solomon the only expression which their love to their Lord desires.

Verses 1-2. The song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Your love is better than wine. The Person here alluded to is not named. This omission is very common and usual to all-absorbing love. The spouse is thinking so much of Christ Jesus her Lord that it is not necessary for her to name Him. She cannot make a mistake and she is so oblivious of all else that she does not think of them, nor of those who would ask, "Who is this of whom you speak?" The communion is so close between herself and her Lord that His name is left out—"Let Him kiss me." By the kiss is to be understood

that strange and blessed manifestation of love which Christ gives from Himself to His children. Inasmuch as the word, "kisses," is in the plural, the spouse asks that she may have the favor multiplied. And inasmuch as she mentions the, "mouth," of her Bridegroom, it is because she wishes to receive the kisses fresh and warm from His sacred Person. "For Your love is better than wine." It is better in itself, for it is more costly. Did it not flow out in streams of blood from a better winepress than earth's best wine has ever known? It is better, too, in its effects—more exhilarating, more strengthening—and it leaves no ill results.

3. Because of the savor of Your good ointments, Your name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love You. The spouse surveys all the attributes of Christ and she compares them to separate and precious ointments. Christ is anointed as Prophet, Priest and King, and in each of these anointings He is a source of sweetness and fragrance to His people. But as if jealous of herself for having talked of the "ointments" when she should have spoken of Him, she seems to say, "Your very name is as an alabaster box when it is opened, and the odor of the precious spikenard fills the room"—

"Jesus, the very thought of You With sweetness fills my breast."

"Your name is as ointment poured forth" and the spouse adds, as a note of commendation, "therefore do the virgins love You."

4. Draw me, we will run after You. She feels, perhaps, as you do now, beloved Brothers and Sisters, heavy of heart. She cannot fly, nor reach her Lord, but her heart longs after Him, so she cries, "Draw me, we will run after You." While she prays the prayer, others feel it suitable to them, also, so they join with her. When Christ draws us, we do not walk, but "run" after Him! There is no heavy going, then! When Christ draws us, how swiftly do we fly, as the dove to the dovecote when Jesus' Grace entices us! Running soon brings the spouse to her Lord, for notice the next clause—

4. The king has brought me into His chambers. It is done—"The King has brought me into His chambers." Come to Him in prayer and, perhaps, while you are yet speaking, He will hear! While you are musing, the fire shall burn and you shall be able to say, "Yes, He has brought me near to Himself, to the retired chamber where I may be alone with Him, to the chamber of riches and delights, where I may feast with Him."

4. We will be glad and rejoice in You. This is the sure result of getting into the inner chamber with Christ.

4. We will remember Your love more than wine: the upright love You. Not only the just in heart—those pure and lowly ones who, wherever the Lamb leads, from His footsteps never depart—but the upright, those who love moral excellence and virtue! They must love Christ. Now the singer's note changes—

5. I am black. Ah, my Soul, how true is that of you! "I am black"—

5. But comely. Oh, glorious faith, that can, through the blackness, still see the comeliness! We are comely when covered with the righteousness of Christ, though black in ourselves! "I am black, but comely"—

5. O you daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar. Smoke-dried, foul, filthy, poverty-stricken.

5. As the curtains of Solomon. Bedecked with embroidery made with gold and silver threads and fit for a king's tent, so strangely mixed is the nature of the Believer—"black but comely" .. "as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

6. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me. Perhaps you are afraid, Beloved, that the Master should look at you, for you feel yourself so unworthy.

6. My mother's children were angry with me. You have been persecuted until your spirit is broken. 6. They made me the keeper of the vineyards. Perhaps you have been put to some ignoble work. You have toiled under the whip of the Law, but you have a worse sorrow than this, for you have to add—

6. But my own vineyard have I not kept. You are conscious that you have restrained prayer, that you have neglected searching the Word, that you have not lived as near to God as you ought to have done—and all this seems to make you feel as if you could not come into close communion with Christ! Come, my Brother, my Sister—shake off your unbelief! May the Master shake it off from you! Then once again you can change the note, as the spouse does here—

7. Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions? There are other shepherds, though they are false ones, and these pretend to be companions of Christ. But why should we turn aside to them? And yet we shall, O our Beloved One, unless You tell us where to follow You and how to abide close by Your side, or tell us where you make Your flock to rest at noon! Here comes the answer—

8. If you know not, O you fairest among women. Just note that. She said that she was black, but Christ says that she is the fairest among women! In fact, there is a passage in the Song where He twice calls her fair. As Erskine puts it—

"Lo! You are fair! Lo! You are fair, Twice fair are you, I say. My Grace, My righteousness becomes Your doubly-bright array."

O you faithful ones, what joy is contained in this warm praise which your Lord gives to you!" If you know not, O you fairest among women—

8. Go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents. There are two ways of finding Christ. First, follow after true Believers—most of you know some experienced Christians—follow their footsteps and you shall so find their God. Or else go to the shepherds' tents—wait on the ministry of the Word—the Lord is often

pleased to manifest Himself to His people when they are willing to hear what messages He sends through His ambassadors.

9. I have compared you, O My love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. True Believers are as strong, as noble, as beautiful as the horses in Pharaoh's chariots which were renowned throughout all the world. Let us be like those horses—let us all pull together—let us draw the great chariot of our King behind us. Let us be content to wear His harness, that we may be partakers of His splendid triumph.

10. Your cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, your neck with chains of gold. Christ here praises His Church. Orientals were in the habit of wearing jewels in such abundance that their cheeks were covered with them, and then they multiplied the chains of gold upon their necks. And the Graces which Christ gives to His people, and especially the various parts of His own finished work become to them like rows of jewels and chains of gold.

11. We will make you borders of gold with studs of silver. As if Father, Son and Holy Spirit would all work together to make the Believer perfectly beautiful.

12-13. While the King sits at His table, my spikenard sends forth the smell thereof. A bundle of myrrh is my Well-Beloved to me. Not a sprig, mark you, but a bundle of myrrh.

13. He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. Christ, as a bundle of myrrh, shall always be near our hearts, so that every life-pulse shall come from Him.

14. My Beloved is to me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi. He is not, I say again, one sprig or spray of camphire, but a cluster of it. The spouse, you see, multiplies figures to describe her Bridegroom and even when she has done so, she cannot reach the height of His Glory—

"Nor earth, nor seas, nor sun, nor stars,
Nor Heaven, His full resemblance bears!
His beauties we can never trace,

Till we behold Him face to face." 16. Behold, you are fair, My love; behold, you are fair; you have doves' eyes. So Christ speaks of His Church. She has the soft, mild, tender eyes of a dove. Besides, she has the discerning eyes by which the dove can distinguish between carrion and fit food. And then she has clear eyes like that of the dove. You know that the dove, or pigeon, when it is taken far away from home and wants to reach its cote, flies round and round till it gets up high and then it looks for miles, perhaps for hundreds of miles, till it tracks with unerring eyes its own resting place, or some familiar landmark, and then, with cutting wings it flies through the ether till it reaches its home! So, every Believer should have doves' eyes—eyes that can see from earth to Heaven, and see Christ in His Glory, even when His cause is disowned by men!

16, 17. Behold, You are fair, my Beloved, yes, pleasant: also our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir. We have the word, "rafters," here, but it should be, "galleries." The "bed" expresses the near fellowship which Christ has with His people.

The "house" is a larger expression and, perhaps, denotes the whole Church. And the "galleries" signify the ordinances of Grace. You notice that these are made of strong wood, the one of cedar and the other of fir and truly, dear Friends, in closing our reading, we can say to our Lord—

"No beams of cedar or of fir
Can with Your courts on earth compare!
And here we wait, until Your love
Raise us to nobler seats above."