

Christ's Perfection and Precedence

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A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 16, 1896.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." Song of Solomon 5:10.

THE spouse in this verse styles her Lord, "my Beloved," from which it is easy for us to gather that it is of the utmost importance that our heart's affection should be really and truly set upon Christ Jesus, our Lord. We must trust Him and we must love Him. Christ on the Cross saves us when He becomes to us Christ in the heart. It is of small service for us to know of Christ if we do not really trust and love Him. It will be of little use for us to talk of Him unless our heart is really welded and knit to Him. Let us, therefore, dear Friends, commence this evening's meditation with a solemn enquiry made by each one for himself or herself, "Can I call the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified on Calvary, but who now reigns at the right hand of the Father—can I truly call Him, 'my Beloved'?" There may be a question raised in your soul by a natural anxiety lest you should presume, but be not content until you have solemnly and seriously searched your hearts, to know whether in very deed and truth an ardent affection burns within your spirit towards the Lord Jesus. It were better for you that you had never been born than that you should live and die without love to Christ. Remember that startling sentence of the Apostle Paul which is so solemn that I can scarcely quote it without tears, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let Him be Anathema Maranatha," that is, "let Him be accursed at the coming of the Lord." It will be so with you, dear Friends, however shining your moral attributes may have been, however you may have carved your name upon the rock of history—you will go down to endless misery and shame unless your heart has in it a vital sense of true religion—a sincere love to the crucified Christ of Calvary!

If this important personal enquiry has had its due weight upon our minds, it may lead us to another consideration, namely, that it is a blessed thing, if we love Christ, to be able to speak about our affection for Him as a matter of course and a matter of fact—not as a thing that hangs trembling in the balance, but as an ascertained Truth of God and certainty. The spouse does not speak of "Him whom I hope to love, by-and-by," or, of "Him whom I trust I shall one day know," but she calls Him, without question or qualification, "my Beloved." She is quite sure about this blessed relationship! She raises no doubts and she has no fears concerning it. I do not say that if any man has a doubt about his love to Christ, he need,

therefore, necessarily condemn himself, but I do say that he must never be content to continue in such a state!

Perhaps they who love the Master best are the very people who will be the most likely to have such a high opinion of the love which He deserves that they will often chide themselves that they do not love Him at all, when they see how little their love is compared with that perfection of affection which He deserves. We must not affirm that the question of anxiety is sinful—it is painful—and anxiety, if it is not Divinely removed, will become sinful, but the anxiety is not so in itself. Yet, Beloved, I beseech you to press on beyond this stage of your pilgrim journey. Do not be content to live on hopes, fears, perhapses and surmises. You would not like to think that, perhaps, you loved your child, or your husband, or your friend. You would not care to say, "I hope I love virtue, I hope I love honesty"—but it is a baser thing, still, for us to allow a question to exist as to whether we love Him who is dearer than our own kindred and who is better than any one moral excellence, seeing that He is the combination of all excellences! O Beloved, seek to reach the blessed heights of full assurance, that each one of you may be able to say of Christ, "This is my Beloved and this is my Friend—I would as soon doubt my own existence as doubt the love that burns within my heart towards Him who has bought me with His precious blood." Sing, as we have often done—

"My Jesus, I love You, I know You are mine,

For You all the follies of sin I resign. My gracious Redeemer, my Savior are Thou, If ever I loved You, my Jesus, 'tis now."

If we have reached that stage in our journey heavenwards, it will be well if we go on a step further. Loving our Lord and Savior in our heart and being assured of that love in our inmost conscience after earnest heart-searching, it will be well if we have the courage to never hesitate in the avowal of that love. Our love to Christ is so sacred a passion that it is not to be talked of in all companies. We must not cast our pearls before swine, but, on the other hand, it is so ennobling a passion that we need never blush to acknowledge it in any company. If we are ever ashamed of loving Christ, we have good reason to be ashamed of such shameful shame! When you have heard His dear name reviled, did you ever start for fear lest you should be called upon to share His reproach? Did you ever sit silent when you ought to have spoken because Christ was being blasphemed? Did you ever try to make it out to yourself that it was a prudent retirement that shunned the conflict when, in very truth, it was a hateful cowardice that turned its back upon the Crucified in the hour of His need? I fear that the charge might be brought against the most of us! If so, let us humbly confess it on our knees, alone, and blush before the Presence of our blessed Master. Remember what we sang just now?—

"Jesus! And shall it ever be?

A mortal man ashamed of Thee!

Ashamed of You, whom angels praise,
Whose glories shine thro' endless days?
Ashamed of Jesus? Sooner far
Let evening blush to own a star!
He sheds the beams of light Divine
O'er this benighted soul of mine.
Ashamed of Jesus? Just as soon
Let midnight be ashamed of noon!
'Tis midnight with my soul, till He,
Bright Morning Star, bid darkness flee.
Ashamed of Jesus? That dear Friend
On whom my hopes of Heaven depend!
No! When I blush, be this my shame,

That I no more revere His name." What can there be to be ashamed of in loving Him whom angels love, whom God loves, whom all holy spirits love? What? Not love Him? If He were not, in Himself, God, yet has He been so good to me that I must love Him! It is an old proverb that we must speak of friends as we find them, and praise the bridge that carries us over the stream. And here is One in whom we have found such goodness, such kindness, such gentleness and such disinterested affection—One who has done such wonders for us that if we do not love Him and boldly declare that we love Him—we have good reason to be ashamed of ourselves and to hide our heads in confusion forever and ever!

Young people, you who have lately come to love Christ, do not begin as some of your fathers did, in that halfhearted fashion which has continued with them until this day. Alas, there are some professing Christians who have grown gray and yet have scarcely ever dared to speak the name of Christ in company! Yes, some of them have even been ashamed, up to this moment, to be baptized and to come to the Lord's Table. They say that they love Christ and I hope they do, yet up to this hour Baptism has been a cross too heavy for them to bear! And the Lord's Supper has seemed to them to be an ordeal instead of a means of blessing! Play the man, young Christian! Be not ashamed to acknowledge your Lord! If ever there was unfurled in this world a banner which deserved the utmost allegiance of human hearts, it is the blood-stained banner of the Cross! And if ever there was a Leader who deserved that men should speak His praises, not—

"With 'bated breath, and whispering humbleness," but with manly enthusiasm, that Leader is the Christ of God who loved you and gave Himself for you! Yes, utter it in the face of a scoffing world! Stand to it in the teeth of a ribald infidel generation! Declare it before the crowd of gainsayers who will mock you to scorn as you pronounce it, "This is my Beloved—the Christ that died, the Christ that always lives at the right hand of God—this is my Beloved, and I am not ashamed to avow Him."

Suppose that we have come as far as this—and I believe that many of us have come so far—it will be our bounden duty to go a step further. Loving Jesus, knowing that we love Him and boldly confessing our love to Him, let us, next, so study His Person and His Character that we shall be able to give a reason for the love that is in us to any who make the enquiry, "What is your Beloved more than another Beloved?" You observe that the spouse not only calls Him, "my Beloved," but she describes the complexion of His Countenance and the details relating to His whole Person. She has a word of praise for all His features and all His members! She knows Him so well that she speaks of Him with a tongue like the pen of a ready writer. So, Beloved, let us study Christ as we come, again, to this Communion Table! You who love and fear Him, neglect not your Bibles. Neglect not that fellowship which, like the light of a candle, shines upon the page of the Bible.

Some of you are studying earthly sciences. Perhaps you give your minds to the classics, or you delight to master the mysteries of mathematics. But oh, take care that this most excellent science, the science of Christ Crucified, is not made to take a second place with you! Always put this science first—try to understand the Glory of your Lord's Person— without beginning of days or end of years! Search into the purity of His Character in all that He was, here below, from His birth to His death. Be conversant with Christ in all His sacred offices. Think much of His precious blood and of all the holy mysteries that cluster around His Cross. Trace Him from Bethlehem to Gabbatha, and then from Gabbatha follow Him in His Resurrection and Ascension along the star-spangled way up to the Throne of His Glory. And let your soul hopefully linger in the full belief of His Second Coming, and in all the Glory that shall surely follow the day of His august appearing. Study Christ! Study Christ so as to be able to tell others of Him and be not slow to communicate to those of an enquiring mind that which you have, yourself, heard, seen and handled of the Word of Life—for so the spouse does in the chapter before us.

This much must suffice by way of introduction, or rather, by way of practical exhortation to such of you as are enlisted beneath Christ's royal banner of love.

Now let us proceed to consider the general description of the Bridegroom given by His spouse in this verse. First, she says, "my Beloved is white and ruddy." These words set forth His charming complexion. Secondly, the spouse calls her Beloved, "the chiefest among ten thousand," and so she describes His personal precedence.

I. First, then, the spouse says, "my Beloved is white and ruddy." And so she sets HIS CHARMING COMPLEXION.

It seems to me that the spouse intends, by these words, to call attention to two chief characteristics of her Lord's most blessed Person. Had not Solomon often seen the snow-white lambs—the emblems of purity—brought up to the Temple to be offered in sacrifice? "So," said he, "my Beloved is white." Had he not also seen the uplifted knife in the priest's hand—and then seen the ruby stream as it flowed down at the foot of the altar till the white

lamb was stained crimson in its own blood? So he puts the two together, the white—the immaculate purity. And the red—the sacrificial blood-shedding. And these two things, whether they are meant in the text or not, are certainly the two essentials of the Christian faith concerning the Person of Christ! And he is no Christian and, indeed, cannot be a Christian who has not well learned and joyously received the two Truths of God which the white and the red here set forth.

Our Lord is, first of all, in Himself, white. That is, He has immaculate perfection of Character. As God, in Him is Light and no darkness at all—perfect purity without a trace of sin. He is very God of very God, the Holy One of Israel. In His Godhead, Jesus Christ is perfection itself. As to His Manhood, the term, whiteness, well describes Him who was born without natural corruption, or taint of hereditary depravity—"that holy Thing"—the Christ of God who became Incarnate, yet without sin. Does not this word, "white" describe Him, also, in His actual life? There was never any sin in Christ. You may challenge every Word of His and you shall find it pure. You may thrust it into the furnace heated seven times hotter than it is known to be heated, yet shall it come forth as it went in, for no dross shall be found in it! As to Christ's actions, they are matchless and perfect in every respect! The two great objectives of His life were the Glory of God and the good of man. So pure, indeed, is the Character of Christ, that even those who have hated His religion and have read the writings of the four Evangelists with no design but to find some ground for mocking—have, nevertheless, been cowed before the majesty of the perfect life of Christ!

In fact, it is today as it was of old, when the officers were sent to take Him prisoner—they went back without Him, for they said, "Never man spoke like this Man." There is no spot in Him! He is the Lamb of God without blemish, the perfect Christ, and, therefore, we love Him. We love those who possess true excellence and, therefore, we must love

Christ, for He has every excellence in perfection! If there were no Atonement—if we did not regard our Lord Jesus as our Savior—still every true heart ought to love Him and to be won to Him. There are such charms in His Character that if our souls were not besotted by the love of sin, we must worship and adore this glorious Son of God who is the brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express image of His Person! He is so white and pure that we ought to love Him!

Next we come to the blood-shedding—the sacrificial Character of Christ. Alas, that this glorious doctrine of the atoning Sacrifice should ever be cast into the background, as it so often is, for the blood-shedding of Christ is the very essence of Christianity! In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ, born of a woman, came into this world as the Substitute for sinners. The vengeance of God against sin was poured out upon Him. He suffered death that those who trust Him might not die—the Lamb of God was slain in their place that He might render satisfaction to the injured honor and broken Law of God. This is the chief reason, after all, why Christ's people love Him—because in His precious blood they see the pardon of all

their sins, they see the lifting of themselves up into the life of God—they see the open way of access to the Father, they see the gates of Heaven opened to all Believers!

Beloved, there are some in these days who cry up the glorified Christ and I will cry Him up with them, nor shall they find a word too strong for His praise! Yet they would have men trust in the glorified Christ—they preach the doctrine of the Second Advent as though it were the chiefteaching of Holy Scripture—and they seem to look to the Second Coming of Christ rather than to the first! But let Paul's words be always our motto, "We preach Christ Crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." With that same Apostle let us cry, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." His Throne is glorious and His Glory shall speak for itself, but the despised and crucified Christ is the source of the sinner's salvation—and this Truth of God is to be preached and held up as the first and cardinal doctrine of our holy faith!

Brothers and Sisters, let us thus look at Jesus, "white" in His spotless innocence, "ruddy" in His sacrificial suffering. Let us view Him as the one sinless Being and also as the chief of martyrs—the One in whom was no sin—yet upon whom the Lord did cause to meet the iniquity of all His people, with all the suffering it deserved and all the vengeance and wrath of Almighty God that were rightly due to the transgressors! I must not detain you longer upon this part of the subject, but I cannot pass from it without asking the question—Do we all love this precious One in whom there is all excellence and in whom there is also this matchless suffering, this sin-atoning grief? Oh, if your heart is truly set on Christ, you have a portion so rich that you need not envy even the angels, for—

"Never did angels taste above, Redeeming Grace and dying love."

If this is your lot, you are happy, thrice happy, though poor, sick and unknown! If Christ is, indeed, your Beloved, you are married to One who is the equal of the Eternal God! If your heart embraces Christ and Christ is really yours, you have more than the world can ever compass! You have more than Heaven, itself, could give if Christ were withdrawn from its courts of Glory. Be happy, then! Be joyous in your Lord! Let your heart go up to Him and rest in Him. And when you come to the Communion Table, let it be with your eyes and your heart fixed on your Beloved, who is "white and ruddy."

But, my dear Hearer, if you have not Christ, oh, how I wish you had Him—and you may have Him this very night! Many of you are strangers to me. At this time of the year, when so many of our regular hearers take their vacation at the seaside, or in the country, there is room for more strangers. Well, dear Friends, we are strangers to one another, but I hope many of you are not strangers to the Master! Or, if you are, possibly the Lord brought you here that you might meet with Him and that He might meet with you. It would be a blessed Sabbath, indeed, to your soul if now you could say, "This perfect Man, I must love Him. This suffering Substitute, I must trust Him. God has laid Him in Zion as a foundation

and a chief cornerstone—I will come and build all my hopes for time and for eternity upon Him and His great atoning Sacrifice."

You are black, poor sinner, but then, He is white! And His white shall stand in the place of your black. You are black, but then He is ruddy. And His crimson blood shall wash away every speck and stain of your sin! All you have to do is simply to look to Him by faith, for there is life in a look at Him! Only trust Him, Trembler! Only trust Him, guilty

Sinner! Only trust Him and that simple trust shall bring you life, health, perfection, Heaven, God Himself! God grant that it may be!

II. Now, passing on to the remaining words of the text, notice that the spouse says of her Beloved that He is, "the chiefest among ten thousand." These words set forth HIS PERSONAL PRECEDENCE.

"The chiefest among ten thousand." Is it not incorrect to say, "the chiefest"? I care not if it is and I would not like to see the word altered into "chief." Human words, at best, are such poor things that they stagger under the mighty burden of the perfections of Christ! We seem to need some of those huge pillars and pedestals that we sometimes see outside massive piles of architecture, that we may bear up the ponderous Truth of our text! We must have such words as "chiefest," for common language does not suffice in such a case as this! I suppose that, in Heaven, they have done with our poor imperfect speech and know how to speak of Christ as He deserves. Anyhow, we believe with good John Berridge—

"Living tongues are dumb at best, We must die to speak of Christ."

He is the chiefest among ten thousand and it so happens that this word, "chiefest," may mean any one of three or four things. First, take it as it stands—"Chiefest"—that is to say, Christ is higher, better, lovelier, more excellent, than any who are round about Him. If you shall bring ten thousand angels, He is the chiefest Angel, the Messenger of the Covenant. If you shall bring ten thousand friends, He is the chiefest Friend, the "Friend that sticks closer than a brother." If you shall bring ten thousand physicians, He is the best Physician, for He heals all diseases. If you find ten thousand shepherds, He is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. If you find one, two, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, all excellent, they must all give way when He appears, as the stars are forgotten when the sun arises in his strength. Christ is the chiefest, the best, the highest of all beings! Whatever excellences there may be in others, they are all eclipsed by the surpassing excellences that are found in Him!

Christ is the chief among ten thousand; that is to say, He is the Head, the Ruler, the Prince, the King, the Lord over all. There He stands, with His feet like most fine gold, and all around Him are the chariots of God that are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, and there is not one who lifts his head as high even as his Lord's feet! And among all the cherubic and seraphic host there is not one who would not count it his highest Heaven to fly at Christ's command to the meanest cottage, or even to a dunghill whereon Lazarus lies

with the dogs licking his sores! Christ is King of all the angels and, here below, too, there are ten thousand forces and powers continually at work, for God has His hosts and armaments on earth as well as in Heaven—but Christ is Lord High Admiral of all the seas, the great Commander-in-Chief of all the battalions, the mighty King who rules over all!

And when He comes into His Church, we know that He is Chief there. Who dares look at Him and claim equality with Him? I tremble at the thought of that dreadful blasphemy which might well have condemned England to the lowest Hell for daring to call an earthly monarch, "the head of the Church." It cannot be! It is sheer impiety for man or angel to ever dare to steal that title of Christ! He, alone, is King in the midst of Zion! He is the one and only Head of the Church! It was a brave deed of Cameron and his comrades to lift up their voices against this infamy when first it sought to spread itself in Scotland. And it is ill on our part that we have not lifted up our voices more loudly against it in this, our land! A man or a woman, head of the Church? No, never! Let Christ and Christ, alone, wear the crown He bought with His own blood! He alone is King and let Him always be so proclaimed and acknowledged!

In matters of religion, we need not Caesar's favor and we fear not Caesar's frown. Christ is the one Head of His Church—and His true Church is free from both the control and the patronage of the State—and so she shall be wherever true hearts beat loyally to Christ, and wherever true lips speak His praises! He is "the chiefest among ten thousand." If there are ten thousand bishops, He is the Bishop of souls! If there are ten thousand fathers, He is "the Everlasting Father." If there are ten thousand teachers, yet shall they not be called Rabbis, for One is our Teacher and Rabbi, even Christ! And at His feet the reverent Church adoringly bows, hailing Him, and Him alone, as Head and Master, "the chiefest among ten thousand."

According to the Septuagint, the text has another meaning. Our Lord, in Scripture, is called the Chosen One, the Elect of God. As the Psalmist puts it, speaking by prophecy, "I have exalted One chosen out of the people." Christ is chosen out of ten thousand as the Mediator to stand between God and men. Whoever else might have been employed by God for this service—and we are not able to think of any other—yet first of all was Christ chosen of God. And today we may call Him the Chosen One because He is the Chosen of His Church. If the question were put to us and a poll were demanded upon it—"Of all the Church of Christ, who shall be Head and Lord? Who shall be Master? Who shall be Teacher? Who shall be the Beloved?"—would not all of us hold up our hands for Him—yes, hands and hearts as well! And we would even lay down our heads on the block if it were necessary to secure His election! Every one of us would, with a burst of acclamation, unconstrained except by His own charms, elect Him to be the Head and Lord in the midst of Zion!

I put to you, dear Hearer, a more personal question—Have you chosen Him? If not, will you, by His Grace, put your hand on your heart, now, and say, "Now have I chosen Him because He has first chosen me"? I pray you at once to make a choice of Him, for if you do,

you will never regret it. I have stood by a great many deathbeds, but there is one scene I never saw, and never expect to see—and that is a child of God repenting that He ever loved Christ Jesus! May you be able to say what we have often sung!—

"'Tis done! The great transaction's done! I am my Lord's, and He is mine!

He drew me and I followed on,

Charmed to confess the voice Divine.

High Heaven, that heard the solemn vow,

That vow renewed shall daily hear

Till in life's latest hour I bow

And bless in death a bond so dear." May Christ be the chosen of your heart! God grant that no soul here may refuse admission to the Prince of Peace!

Lastly, according to the margin of our Bible, the text bears this meaning and probably should be thus read, "He is the Standard-Bearer among ten thousand." The, "ten thousand," we may consider to be the warriors of God enlisted to fight His battles against error and sin. Who is the Standard-Bearer of God's militant host below? The only answer is that, "Christ is the Standard-Bearer among ten thousand." For a standard-bearer, there was need of a select man with good strong arms who could firmly grasp the pole that held aloft the standard—a man resolute of heart, who, having once taken charge of the flag, would sooner die than loose his hold of the colors. It needed for a standard-bearer one who was courageous, one who would not be alarmed by the din and strife of battle and turn his back, but who would go at the head of the host, carrying the banner into the very thick of the fray to lead on the militant band till they had put all their foes to the rout. The standard-bearer should be a stronger man than all the rest of the host, for—

"If the standard-bearer falls,

As fall full wel he may," what mischief would come to the host and what confusion to this hearts of all the warriors!

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has come into this world and set up a standard because of the Truth of God and well does He handle it, firmly does He grasp it. When on the Cross, the battle thickened round Him—all the hosts of Hell and all the bands of cruel ones on earth sought to strike Him and to seize the Standard—but He bore it still aloft through all the dreadful fray! And this day, though He is now in Heaven, yet by His blessed Spirit that Standard is still unfurled to the breeze. In the order of His Providence, it seems to me that Christ is always bearing that Standard a little farther and a little farther on—and if Christians would but keep nearer to Christ and be more like He is, the victories of His Church would be daily fresh and new!

We should soon see this world conquered for Christ if we kept step with the Divine Standard-Bearer. He is bearing that Standard in front of some of you into that alley at the back of the house where you live—dare you follow Him and go and win some spoil for Him?

Christ's banner is uplifted in many parts of London tonight—dare you follow it? Dare you stand in the streets and in the by-ways to tell of Heaven's accomplished salvation, and of Christ's finished work that saves from death and Hell? The nations of the earth need the Gospel! Christ is opening the gates of brass to our missionaries—are there no young men here who will follow Christ's banner as it gleams afar? Have I no young John Williams here? Is there no young man here who will be a Robert Moffat or a William Knibb? There is the Standard-Bearer— Christ is not in the background! Oh, why should we be so slow to follow Him? We are not straitened in Him, but in ourselves! God give us to be worthy followers of so glorious a Standard-Bearer as Christ Jesus our Lord!

Lift up your eyes to Heaven and see Him, there, bearing the Standard at the right hand of God! The troops are marshalling! The bugle sounds for some of us! Gray-heads, are you ready? Young men and maidens, are you ready? If the trumpet sounds in your ears tonight, are you ready to rally round that Standard and to sing the praises of Him who has called you? He is coming soon and then, when the Standard-Bearer is here, shall we have a share in His triumph? Shall we rise to shame and confusion of face, or shall we rise to participate in the splendor of His universal reign? God grant that we may all love and trust the Divine Standard-Bearer and that we may all be found among His faithful soldiers forever-more!

The Lord be with you, Beloved, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH61.

Verse 1. The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me. You know who it is that speaks these words, our Lord Jesus, Himself.

1, 2. Because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the meek; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. The Divine Messiah comes to usher in the true Jubilee—the blessed day in which the poor shall have the Gospel preached to them and in which the broken-hearted shall find their brokenness healed. He comes to bring the captive ones back from the Babylon of sin and to deliver from prison all those who, because of their transgressions, are bound with fetters. In a word, He comes to proclaim that now is the accepted time, now is the day of Grace, now is the year of Jubilee. As for the adversaries of His people, to them it shall be "the day of vengeance of our God," for the Lord will deal out to them, measure for measure, as they have dealt to His oppressed and persecuted people.

3. To appoint to them that mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty—Or, "a coronet"—

3. For ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified. When Jesus comes, He brings all things with Him, for He is all things to His people and they find their all in Him. There is no sorrow at His coming to those who receive

Him—it is gladness—gladness repeated and gladness multiplied. Not only does joy come in one form, but in many, as the verses of this chapter so sweetly remind us! And that which comes is permanent, making those that receive it to be like long-standing trees, for they shall outlive their sorrows and prove that they were planted by God for His own Glory.

4. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. Truly, God's living Church today shall do all this! The Jewish Church became a waste and God's Glory seemed to be trodden under the foot of His foes, but the true children of the promise—they who are counted for the seed, even as many as believe, who are thus the seed of believing Abraham—shall build up all these wastes and happy shall they be in such joyous service!

5. 6. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: you shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall you boast yourselves. Because of the sin of His people, the aliens and the foreigners trample upon them. But if you and I are truly of the holy seed, having living faith in Christ, we shall look upon the whole race of men as enduring all their care and toil on our behalf. They shall be our plowmen and our vinedressers, but we shall be the ministers of God, the priests of the Lord, making use of every new invention—traveling by steam, speaking by telephone—using everything for God's Glory, letting men invent all they can and we, ourselves, turning all things to account for the honor and Glory of our God. I know that there is another fulfillment of this test for God's ancient people, but this is also a fulfillment of it to us who are His spiritual people, His real children, born according to the promise.

7. For your shame you shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. That is a sweet state of heart for any of us to be in—to rejoice in our portion! Oh, what a wonderful portion we have to rejoice in! How blessed is the lot of God's chosen people! However small a part of our portion may be visible to the eyes here below, yet we can sing—

"All things are ours, the gift of God,

The purchase of a Savior's blood! While the good Spirit shows us how To use and to improve them too."

Instead of confusion such as once was the lot of the righteous, "they shall rejoice in their portion."

7. Therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be to them. Here is another choice expression—"everlasting joy." Theirs is not a transient joy like the mirth of fools, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot, but, "everlasting joy shall be to them."

8. For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burned offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. That is why they

have everlasting joy. There would be no everlasting joy if it were not for the Everlasting Covenant! Those gentlemen who want to cut that word, "everlasting," out of our Bibles will find that it will be a very long while before we shall agree to be rid of it! No, we shall never consent to give it up! We shall always rejoice that we have God's everlasting love and an Everlasting Covenant and, therefore, that we shall have everlasting joy!

9. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles. They shall be discerned and distinguished. Just as surely as you may know a Jew anywhere in the world, today, so shall men know the people of God. Though they wear no peculiar garb, yet their speech shall betray them. There shall be a something about them which shall bear testimony to the fact that "they are the seed which the Lord has blessed." "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles." —

9, 10. And their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD has blessed. I will greatly rejoice—Not a little, for He is a great God, so, "I will greatly rejoice" in Him. "The Lord has done great things for us." Let us, therefore, greatly rejoice in Him. "I will greatly rejoice"—

10. In the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God. Not only shall my lips be full of joy, but my inmost nature, the very essence of my being—"my soul shall be joyful in my God." "In my God." That is a stage higher than saying, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord." We do greatly rejoice in the Lord, but our very souls joyful when we can, each one, call Him, "my God." That is a possession that the richest among you may well envy if you do not have it.

10. For He has clothed me with the garment of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. The loveliest sight in the world is one of God's people. We sometimes sing, and sadly sing, concerning this earth—

"Where every prospect pleases, And only man is vile."

But there is another side to that picture, for when the "man" is a true child of God, we can say—

"Though every prospect pleases, Yet man outshines them all!"

Well did the Psalmist sing, "You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor." Angels do homage to the renewed man, for the promise is, "They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone." You who are children of God need not wish to change places, even, with an archangel, for you are brother to Him who sits upon the Throne of God! You wear a nature that is akin to that of the Only-Begotten! Indeed, it is the same nature as His! Glory, then, in this great Truth of God—that you are covered with the robe of righteousness, decked with ornaments like a bridegroom, and adorned with jewels like a bride!

11. For as the earth brings forth her bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. They are sown in the earth at present, but, as the seeds come up in the springtime beneath the genial showers and the shining of the sun, so righteousness and praise shall, in due time, come up in a golden harvest on every hill and valley of this poor sinful world! Hasten it, O Lord, hasten it in Your own good time! Amen.