

Fragrant Graces

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"While the King sits at His table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance." Song of Songs 1:12.

THIS passage may be read in several ways. Literally, when Christ tabled among men, when He did eat and drink with them, being found in fashion as a Man, the loving Spirit broke the alabaster box of precious ointment on His head while the King was sitting at His table. Three times did the Church thus anoint her Lord, once His head and twice His feet, as if she remembered His threefold office and the threefold anointing which He had received of God the Father to confirm and strengthen Him. So she rendered Him the threefold anointing of her grateful love, breaking the alabaster box and pouring the precious ointment upon His head and upon His feet. Beloved, let us imitate the example of those who have gone before. Though we cannot, as the weeping penitent, wash His feet with our tears, or wipe them with the hairs of our head, like that gracious woman—we may be cautious of nothing, of fair adornments, or fond endowments—if we can but serve His cause or honor His Person. Let us be willing to "pour contempt on all our pride," and "nail our glory to His Cross." Have you anything tonight that is dear to you? Resign it to Him! Have you any costly thing like an alabaster box hidden away? Give it to the King! He is worthy and when you have fellowship with Him at His table, let your gifts be brought forth. Offer unto the King thanksgiving and pay your vows unto the Most High.

But the King is gone from earth. He is seated at His table in Heaven, eating bread in the Kingdom of God. Surrounded now not by publicans and harlots, but by cherubim and seraphim, not by mocking crowds, but by adoring hosts, the King sits at His table and entertains the glorious company of the faithful—the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven! He fought before He could rest. On earth He struggled with His enemies and it was not till He had triumphed over all, that He sat down at the table on high! There sit, You King of kings, there sit until Your last enemy shall be made Your footstool! What can we do, Brothers and Sisters, while Christ sits at the table above? These hands cannot reach Him. These eyes cannot see Him. But our prayers, like sweet perfume, set burning here on earth, can rise in smoke to the place where the King sits at His table—and our spikenard can diffuse a perfume even in Heaven itself! Do you want to reach Christ? Your prayers can do it! Would you now adore Him? Would you now set forth your love? With mingled prayer and praise, like the offering of the morning and the evening sacrifice, your incense can come up acceptably before the Lord!

And, Brothers and Sisters, the day is coming when the King shall sit at His table in royal state. Lo, He comes! Lo, He comes! Let the Church never forget that. The First Advent is her faith—the Second Advent is her hope. The First Advent with the Cross lays the foundation—the Second Advent with the crown brings forth the top stone. The former was ushered in with sighs—the latter shall be hailed with shouts of, "Grace, Grace unto it." And when the King, manifested and recognized in His Sovereignty over all lands, shall sit at His table with His Church, then, in that blessed Millennium, the Graces of Christians shall give forth their odors of sweet savor!

We have thus read the text in three ways, and there is a volume in each, but we turn over another page, for we need to read it in relation to the spiritual Presence of Christ as He does now reveal Himself to His people. "When the King sits at His table"—that is, when we enjoy the Presence of Christ—"my spikenard gives forth its fragrance." Then our graces are in active exercise and yield a perfume agreeable to our own soul and acceptable before God.

In the train of reflection I shall now attempt to follow. My manner must be hurried and should it seem feeble, Brothers and Sisters, I cannot help it. If you get fellowship with Christ, I care little for the merits of my sermon, or the perils of your criticism. One thing, alone, I crave, "Let Him kiss us with the kisses of His mouth"—then shall my soul be well content, and so will yours be also! The first observation we make shall be this—

I. EVERY BELIEVER HAS GRACE IN POSSESSION AT ALL TIMES.

The text implies that when the King is not present, the spikenard yields no smell, but the spikenard is there for all that. The spouse speaks of her spikenard as though she had it, and only needed to have the King come and sit at the table to make its presence known and felt. Ah, well, Believer, there is Grace in your heart if you are a child of God! When you cannot see it yourself. When your doubts have so covered up all your hopes, that you say, "I am cast out from His Presence"—yet for all that, Grace may be there. When the old oak has lost its last leaf by the howling blasts of winter. When the sap is frozen up in the veins and you cannot, though you search to the uttermost branch, find so much as the slightest sign of verdant existence, still, even then, the substance is in the tree when it has lost its leaves. And so with every Believer, though his sap seems frozen and his life almost dead, yet if once planted, it is there! The eternal life is there when he cannot discover it himself. Do you know—if not, I pray you may never know experimentally—that there are many things that keep a Christian's spikenard from being poured out? Alas, there is our sin! Ah, shameful, cruel sin, to rob my Master of His Glory! But when we fall into sin, of course, our Graces become weak and yield no fragrance to God. Ah, too, there is our unbelief which puts a heavy stone on all our Divine Graces, and blows out the heat which was burning the frankincense, so that no altar smoke arises towards Heaven. And often, it may be, it is our bitterness of spirit, for when our mind is cast down, we hang our harps upon the willows

so that they give forth no sweet music unto God. And, above all, if Christ is absent, if through neglect or by any other means our fellowship with Him is suspended, Grace is there—but oh, it cannot be seen! There is no comfort springing from it. But, Beloved, though we mention this to begin with, we rather choose to pass on and observe that—

II. GRACE IS NOT GIVEN TO A CHRISTIAN TO BE THUS HIDDEN, BUT IT IS INTENDED THAT,

LIKE SPIKENARD, IT SHOULD ALWAYS BE IN EXERCISE.

If I understand a Christian aright, he should be a man readily discerned. You do not need to write upon a box that contains spikenard, with the lid open, the word, "Spikenard." You will know it is there—your nostrils would tell you. If a man should fill his pockets with dust, he might walk where he would, and though he should scatter it in the air, few would notice it. But let him go into a room with his pockets full of musk, and let him drop a particle about—he is soon discovered because the musk speaks for itself! Now true Grace, like spikenard or any other perfume, should speak for itself. You know our Savior compares Christians to lights. There is a crowd of people standing yonder—I cannot see those who are in the shadow, but there is one man whose face I can see well, and that is the man who holds the torch. Its flames light up his face so that we can readily catch every feature. So, whoever is not discovered, the Christian should be obvious at once! "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth, for your speech betrays you." Not only should the Christian be perceptible, but Grace has been given to him that it might be in exercise! What is faith, unless it is believing? What is love, unless it is embracing? What is patience, unless it is enduring? To what purpose is knowledge, unless it is revealing truth? What are any of those sweet Graces which the Master gives us, unless they yield their perfume? I fear we do not gaze enough upon that face covered with the bloody sweat, for if we did, as sure as the King was thus in our thoughts sitting at His table, we would be more like He, we would love Him more, we would live more passionately for Him and would spend and be spent, that we might promote His glory. I just note this point, and then pass on, that Believers' Graces, like spikenard, are meant to give forth their smell. But here is the pith of our whole subject, though we have little time to linger upon it—

III. THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH A CHRISTIAN'S GRACES CAN BE PUT INTO EXERCISE IS THAT HE

MUST HAVE THE PRESENCE OF THE MASTER.

He is called "the King." I am told that the Hebrew word is very emphatic, as if it said, "The King"—the King of kings, the greatest of all Kings. He must be such to us—absolute Master of our hearts, Lord of our soul's domain, the unrivalled One in our estimation to whom we render obedience with alacrity. We must have Him as King, or we shall not have His Presence to revive our Graces. And when the King communes with His people, it is said to be at "His table," not at ours. Specially may this apply to the Table of Communion. It is

not the Baptists' table. It is not my table. It is His Table because if there is anything good on it, remember, He spread it! No, there is nothing on the table unless He Himself is there. There is no food to the child of God unless Christ's body is the flesh, and Christ's blood the wine. We must have Christ! It must be emphatically His Table by His being present, by His spreading it, His presiding at it, or else we have not His Presence at all. I find the Hebrew word here signifies a "round table." I do not know whether that is intended which I understand by it—perhaps it is—it suggests to me a blessed equality with all His disciples sitting at His round

table, as if there were scarcely a head, but He was one of them, so close the communion He holds with them sitting at the table, so dear His fellowship, sitting like one of them, made like unto His Brothers and Sisters in all things at His round table.

Well, now, we say that when Christ comes into the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, or any other ordinance, straightway our Graces are vigorous. How often have we resolved that we would live nearer to Christ? Yet, though we have resolved, and re-resolved, I fear it has all ended with resolving. Perhaps we have prayed over our resolutions and for a little season we have sought them very earnestly, but our earnestness soon expired like every other fire that is of human kindling—and we made but little progress. Be not disheartened, my Beloved in the Lord! I tell you, whether you are able to believe it or not, that if your heart is this night cold as the center of an iceberg, yet if Christ shall come to you, your soul shall be as coals of juniper that have a most vehement flame! Though to your own apprehension you seem to be dead as the bones in a cemetery, yet if Jesus comes to you, you shall forthwith be as full of life as the seraphs who are as flames of fire! Why do you think He will not come to you? Do you not remember how He did melt you when first He manifested Himself to your soul? You were as vile, then, as you are now. You were certainly as ruined, then, as you are now! You had no more to merit His esteem, then, than you have now—you were as far off from Him, then, as you are now—I might say even further off. But lo, He came to you when you did not seek Him! He came in the Sovereignty of His Grace and the sweetness of His mercy when you despised Him! Why, then, should He not come to you now?

Oh, breathe the prayer—tenderly and hopefully breathe the prayer—"Draw me," and you will soon find power to run, and when all your passions and powers are fled, the King will speedily bring you into His chamber! Dark as your present state may be, there are sure signs of breaking day. I want you, Brothers and Sisters, to believe and to expect that you shall hold this night with Christ the richest, sweetest fellowship that ever mortal was privileged to enjoy, and that all of a sudden! I know your cares—forget them! I know your sins—bring them to His feet! I know the wandering of your heart—ask Him to tether you to His Cross with the same cords that bound Him to the pillar of His flagellation. I know your brain is perplexed and your thoughts flying here and there, distracted with many cares—put on the crown of thorns and let that be the antidote of all your manifold disquietudes! I think Jesus

is putting in His hand by the hole of the door. Is not your heart moved for Him? Rise up and welcome Him! And as the bread is broken and the wine is passed round, come, and eat and drink of Him, and be not a stranger to Him. "Let not conscience make you linger." Let not doubts and fears hold you back from fellowship with Him who loved you before the earth was, but rest your unworthy head upon His blessed bosom and talk with Him, even though the only words you may be able to say may be, "Lord, is it I?" Do seek fellowship with Him, as one who ignores every thought, feeling, or fact besides. So may it please Him to manifest Himself to you and to me as He does not to the world.

If you that have never had fellowship with Christ think I am talking nonsense, I do not marvel. But let me tell you, if you had ever known what fellowship with Christ means, you would pawn your eyes, and barter your right arm, and give your estates away as trifles for the priceless favor! Princes would sell their crowns and peers would renounce their dignities to have five minutes' fellowship with Christ. I will vouch for that. Why, I have had more joy in my Lord and Master in the space of the ticking of a clock than could be crammed into a lifetime of sensual delights, or of the pleasures of taste, or of the fascinations of literature! There is a depth, a matchless depth, in Jesus' love! There is a luscious sweetness in the fellowship with Him. You must eat, or you will never know the flavor of it. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Behold how ready He still is to welcome sinners. Trust Him and live. Feed on Him and grow strong. Commune with Him and be happy. May every one of you who shall sit at the Table have the nearest approach to Jesus that you ever had! Like two streams that, after flowing side by side, at length unite, so may Christ and our soul melt into one, even as Isis melts into Thames, till only one life shall flow so that the life we live in the flesh shall be no more ours, but Christ that lives in us! Amen.