

Balmer Commentary Collection

The Song of Solomon

Foreword

"This commentary provides a key to the understanding of the whole and of every verse which the humblest Christian can easily follow. I predict that all who read it and study it will agree with me in saying that they have never read anything more uplifting and heart-warming. It will lead them to their Lord and make them able to know and to realize His love as they have never done before." (Dr. M Lloyd-Jones).

Introduction

There is nothing in this Song contrary to delicacy of taste and purity of thought.

We are obliged to think that the Divine poet had in his mind, in these sketches, the bride and bridegroom in their bridal dress.

There can be no reason why some parts of the body should be spoken of as dressed and others

not, especially as those so mentioned are not the parts which delicacy requires to be kept from view. See 1:10, and 7:1, the feet with sandals.

The mention of some, especially under such circumstances, supports us in concluding that the intention of the poet was, the others should be understood as so dressed.

The situation in which the parties are placed leads us to look for this, because there was no time when they were more carefully dressed, and wore more costly decorations than at the celebration of marriages.

These descriptions of the bride and the beloved are in public, and in circumstances where the remarks must refer to impressions of beauty, heightened by the beauty of a bridal dress. In 5:9-16, the words of the bride are addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem in the street; and in chapter 6 and 7 the language is evidently uttered in the garden among the virgins. See 6:2, in connection with 5:8,9.

The end in view here, is to set out the beauty of the two parties; beauty of dress, so far from interfering with this glory of appearance, was the direct means for increasing its effect; every thing offensive to our ideas of what is beautiful must be excluded.

“The general Church of Christ hold that in this Divine Song are contained the mysteries of the love of Christ and the Church”.

Taking, therefore, this Song as a parable, whose imagery has been drawn from the court of Solomon, for picturing the shared love of Christ and the Church, we cannot understand it fully, without viewing that love as exercised in the case of individual believers. Jesus loves the Church, by loving every single member of the Church; and shows His love to the Church, by a special evidence made to every member of the Church.

The Song was given to picture that love; and therefore it must be interpreted by looking at the evidences of the love of Jesus towards every believer, and at the answering exercises of every believer towards Jesus.

1:1. The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

This book sings of the wonderful love of God, which is the spring of the new creation, the deliverance from guilt, the comfort, the heavenly prospects that are about in our world of woe. It sings of the same love which is the burden of the new song in heaven.

1:2. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth:

The language of the bride is a desire that the beloved would give her those evidences of affection which none but the most cherished friends can have right to receive. They express the desire of the godly heart, that the Lord Jesus would give us evidences of the love which none but His dearest friends can receive, or have reason to expect.

for your love is better than wine.

That is, your love is more reviving and inspiring than the most delightful of the pleasures of sense. How much better than wine is the love of family? the love of friends? How much better than all these is the love of Jesus?

1:3. Because of the scent of your good oils your name is as perfume poured out,

The whole nature of Christ is as fragrant oil, so pure, so delightful, and so excellently Divine. The loveliness of Jesus consists in this Divinity, this fountain of liquid perfume which is continually pouring out in deeds of kindness to His creatures.

This holy perfume of the Divine nature fills the precious vessel of His human nature full, and running over on every side.

Through His broken body, are these excellences of the Divine nature, mercy, love, grace, truth, forgiveness, and holiness, unsealed to ruined man. His crucifixion was the breaking of the vessel containing the precious oil; and then did the fragrance of His name begin to spread widely for filling the world.

As so poured out, how precious is His name, in the hour of repentance, in trouble, in suffering, in temptation, in sickness, in death!

therefore the virgins love you.

The persons who love Him whose name is so precious, are "the virgins", the pure in heart. Those only can love Jesus, who purify themselves even as He is pure. Those whose souls have been made pure by the fruit of the Spirit, whose hearts have been fed by heavenly grace, are continually rising to Jesus in the purity of flames of love, fed by the Holy Spirit. Their love is made so earnest by their seeing His essential purity, excellence, and loveliness.

1:4. Draw me, we will run after you:

Every glimpse of the beauty of Christ increases our desire to know more of His loveliness, and strengthens the earnestness of our affections. The character of Christ, as opened to the heart by the Holy Spirit, is that which corrects our natural laziness, and kindles within us the desire of following Him with all our energy, of running after Him. When the Holy Spirit unfolds the loveliness of Christ, and restores the seeing powers of the heart, we are naturally drawn towards Jesus.

the king has brought me into his rooms:

When we are inclined towards our Lord with moving affections - running after Him - He receives us, and brings us into His rooms, the place into which none are admitted but His confidential friends. No friendship is so close, reliable, honourable, and confidential, as that existing between Jesus and the soul of the saint.

we will be glad and rejoice in you,

As our joy must increase in purity and intensity with every step of approach towards Him, when we rest with Him at the throne of grace, our joy must be full.

we will remember your love more than wine:

How tender the recollection of the times and places where first this precious Friend met us with the assurance of forgiveness, where His Spirit melted down the soul in deep repentance, where we had brightening views of heaven, where Jesus showed us His glory and gave us His love!

the upright love you.

In v.3, it is said, the virgins, or the pure in heart, love Him. Here, the same persons are said to love Him with sincerity, with a love they have good reason to enjoy - a love pure, deep, and intense. We feel that, like ourselves, our brethren are controlled by simplicity and godly sincerity in their devotion and love to Jesus.

1:5. I am black, but lovely, Oh you daughters of Jerusalem,

Love and communion with Jesus is the means of giving to us a more correct knowledge of ourselves. By the daughters of Jerusalem are here meant those companions of the bride, the saint, in the spiritual Jerusalem, with whom we, though strangers and foreigners, are brought into union by conversion.

as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

The original beauty of the human soul has been clouded and blackened by sin, yet through grace, there is gathering around it a covering of holy virtues. The redeemed soul, the King's daughter, is all glorious within. The beauty and glory of the believer are now very much hidden from the world. Our life is a hidden life. Of the existence of holy graces within us, we cannot be unconscious, if we are the sons of God; yet will we be painfully aware of our sin and corruption.

1:6. Look not on me, because I am black,

Communion with Jesus leads the soul enjoying it to draw back from courting the attention and admiration of men, even of our fellow Christians. Grace makes us see our vileness and weakness, so as to feel unworthy of any glory, and realize how dangerous is praise to the good of the soul.

because the sun has looked on me:

This sense of inward corruption, of the hateful effects of sin on the heart, better known to ourselves than any others through the light of the

Spirit, makes us draw back from the applause of men, and feel unworthy of the favour of God.

Love to the Lord Jesus, special tokens of His favour, meekness, and humility of heart, are no security against hatred and ill-treatment from the world, and even from followers of Christ.

my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards;

The remains of corruption in the hearts of good men prove elements of disagreement, strife, and collision. The love of power, desire of importance, jealousy of rivals in ability and influence, often excite to efforts for keeping down brethren whose offence is that they are apparently greater in learning, godliness, or usefulness.

How common for different sects, even of evangelical Christians, to try to injure, if not destroy, each other's influence. The spirit of slander and selfishness, so widespread in the world, will never be entirely banished from the church, until we reach the spirits of just men made perfect.

Among those of the same sect, how common for such as live near to Christ to be envied, slandered, and ill treated by their brethren.

Those show themselves to have departed most from the temper of the world, and come nearest to Jesus, who strive not to pull down others, but

develop love to Christ's people wherever found, showing kindness and patience towards the persecuting spirit yet hanging around them, as well as towards the ill-will of the unrepentant.

The soul so blessed with Jesus' love, feels and confesses its failings, short-comings, and neglect of duty;

but my own vineyard have I not kept.

A sense of unworthiness increases with growth in grace. No man feels so sharply how far he falls below the full measure of holy duties, godly zeal, and heavenly love, as he who is growing up nearest to the height of a perfect one in Christ.

Duties have been neglected, opportunities of service wrongly used, watchfulness unheeded, prayer offered with coldness, temptation tampered with, self-denial too little exercised, every thing, indeed, however laborious our godliness, bearing traces of the failing impossible to separate from earth, and filling us with deep humiliation.

Many duties have been crowded out of place by selfish desires; and with those which have been done are mixed many failings, and much of an improper spirit. Grace makes the believer feel painfully, how much more closely he might have walked with God, how much more his privileges might have been well used.

1:7. Tell me, Oh you whom my soul loves, where you feed,

The bride having been received so kindly and feeling increased intenseness of affection, wishes to follow the beloved, not merely as one among the mixed crowd, but enjoying, as she had already, the pleasure of his large tent and society.

When this Shepherd-king goes over a wide area to take charge of His flock, we would go with Him, anxious to be with Him in difficulty, weariness, and danger, no less than among the luxuries of His palace. The spiritual Christian has his attention so taken up with the loveliness of Christ, as to overlook, or meet with liveliness, all obstacles in reaching the presence of his Lord.

“Tell me, where you feed”. There are places where Jesus may be found; and we must be careful to keep near Him, among His flock. He has a variety of pastures into which He leads His flock. Tell me - make me to know by the inward voice of Your Spirit, and by the outward guiding of Your providence, where and what are those situations and activities in life, and those seasons filled by more than usual influences of the Holy Spirit, in which I may live, not by my own choice, but by Your appointment, and there enjoy unceasing Your gracious presence and Your Shepherd-care.

where you make your *flock* to rest at noon:

In following our Lord, we must expect not only to enjoy seasons when every thing in the spiritual life is calm, dewy, and refreshing, like the morning; but also to meet times when all things combine to weary, discourage, and exhaust the spirit with the withering power of a glowing noon. But there are at such times, wells and fountains in this wilderness. They are known to our good Shepherd, and He will so guide us, that we may, when worn with the difficulties of our pilgrimage, sit there, and drink, and with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation.

There is an "hour of temptation", and an hour of suffering. These are sure to follow any remarkable flowing of grace to us. Wearied with the attacks of Satan; worn with toil; oppressed with grief; with the cherished objects who returned our affection, gone by death; and those from whom we have a right to expect better things, treating us with neglect, thanklessness, and scorn, how anxiously does the soul, feeling there is but the one object, even Jesus, left for it to love, seek His hand to guide us where there is shelter from evil, and where on His bosom the weary are at rest.

for why should I be as one who turns aside by the flocks of your companions?

Native tendency towards evil and darkness inclines us to adopt the teachings of others rather than of Christ; to turn aside from the Redeemer, even though no farther than after His companions. Much of the divisions among Christians has sprung from the inclination to turn away from God even in Christ, and hold to men, to church organizations or forms of doctrine.

Even when holding firmly to Christ, we find within us a tendency to model our religious life after the example of our godly companions, without thinking of rising above the general tone of feeling around us, and to take as the pattern to which our ambition and efforts for holiness aim, the life of some notable saint, rather than the glorious righteousness of Christ.

This love, as here expressed, desires to follow Jesus only, to take His example. Taking His truth as the first rule of duty, and His life as the only perfect image of what ours should be, we study to be not so much like any development of godliness in any saint however notable, as to be like Christ.

While valuing church organizations, this love puts them in their proper place, without letting them come between the soul and Christ, and rejoices in the prosperity of religion among undoubted

Christians, even though not of its own sect. While these means of grace, creeds, and denominations, are seen necessary in the present state of man, we are able to feel they are small things in comparison with Jesus, to be done away in heaven.

1:8. If you know not, Oh you fairest among women, go your way forward by the footsteps of the flock,

While the godly are despised by the world, as possessing nothing of loveliness, Jesus looking on the heart, beyond the mere graces of person and manners, sees the saint as the fairest among the sons of men. God, who is love, begins His estimate of beauty, by taking into consideration, first of all the heart, and the heart purified by love. Whatever our outward circumstances, even though unfavourable in appearance as those of Lazarus, we are beautiful in His eyes, if the heart is filled with the clear and life-giving influences of the Holy Spirit.

If you know not, if you are at any time in doubt, follow the example of those gone before you to glory. Christ is given as our Example. We are to follow the saints as they follow Christ. It is necessary to have the examples of both constantly before us. We require something visible and that

can be touched; we must see the thing not only described, but done before our eyes.

There is danger of overlooking Christ as our Model, while receiving Him as our Teacher. It is required in an instructor that himself should do what he teaches others. This was notably done by Jesus when staying for a time on earth. While receiving His teachings, we must study to find how He carried out the spirit of such instructions, in His actions. God has set out, in the humanity of Christ, a perfect model for those who would reach moral perfection.

It has ever been a device of Satan, to draw attention away from Jesus to His saints – first from His example, and then from His instructions – to the lives of martyrs and the teachings of the fathers, as they are called. When he cannot succeed in doing both, he will be satisfied in turning our view from the example of Christ, while we keep our hold on His Word. No man is without mistake, either in doctrine or practice, and accordingly, those who are content with human guides, may be more easily corrupted by drinking in their errors. The coldness of many Protestants springs from losing sight of the living example of Christ, while His Word may be kept and perhaps studied.

But the example of the followers of Christ, is however of great value. In many things, Jesus cannot be imitated. There are spiritual exercises

arising from our being fallen sinners, and in a course of being made holy, that Jesus could never know. New birth, repentance, sorrow for sin, conversion, temptations to sin caused by corruptions of the heart, are things He could not have personally experienced. As a result, if we are to enjoy on this ground, the advantage of any who has been before us, this must be found, not in the history of Jesus, but in the lives of His people. We need the example of a perfect model like Jesus, towards which to be made like; and the example of fallen men in process of restoration by grace to the image of Christ, that through the knowledge of their exercises we may have warning, comfort, and hope. Great encouragement is drawn from studying the lives of those who have been among us, and have passed through like difficulties and conflicts to glory.

and feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents.

Our Lord's ministers are under-shepherds. Jesus is to be sought by following in the footsteps marked out for His people; and by waiting for Him near the shepherds' tents, in the use of the means of a regular ministry, and by "feeding the kids", that is, in the carrying out of duties of usefulness to the souls of others, particularly the young.

While religion requires us to be much alone with God, it also requires us to be much with man, especially the brethren and the ministry. They are appointed by Jesus in His place. These words include the duty of keeping ourselves under the influence of all the means of the church, at the head of which stands the ministry of the Word. With this, must be joined active usefulness. The deepest spirit of love, and of familiarity with the glory of Jesus, is not found in secret, nor in action alone, but in the two combined.

There is something which every Christian may do, and must do, in feeding the Church of God.

“Feeding the kids” requires that we are careful in training our family in the ways of the Redeemer; that we do good to those whom we may find, by seeking opportunity, in our daily walk; and that in the Sabbath-school, we labour according to our situation, in training the young to follow Jesus.

**1:9. I have compared you, Oh my love,
to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots.**

The Egyptian horses were celebrated for their beauty. Though unusual in the present age, this comparison will appear beautifully fitting, when we call to mind still further the affectionate adoration and tenderness with which these animals are regarded by the people of the east.

“My love”. This shows the deep, devoted, outstanding, and tender love of Jesus for His people. To the original affection felt for them as for the holy angels and all His creatures, is superadded the tenderness necessarily arising towards those for whom He has suffered, and the love arising from forming them a second time as new creatures. Considering the saint as following Him through the difficulties of pilgrimage in the wilderness, with self-denial, energy, and perseverance, Jesus would indicate by this comparison, that there is in the Christian character something noble, fitted to impress us with respect, and to command our admiration.

Godliness, as seen in God’s people here, is at best a conflict of grace with corruption, a longing and struggling after perfection. Whatever meanness may be seen in God’s people, is owing not to their religion, but to their remaining corruptions. Grace raises the fallen soul of man. By the grace which is carrying our fallen nature back to the perfection of Paradise, we cannot but be made noble.

1:10. Your cheeks are lovely with rows of jewels, your neck with chains of gold.

How beautiful those pearls of virtue and chains of heavenly graces, given by God, grouped together

by the invisible thread of Divine influence, while kept steadfast and lit up by the golden clasp of love.

These virtues, the beauty of the saint, are something different from his character by nature, and are superadded by grace. What jewels of the bride, so beautiful as those gifts! What chains of gold, so lovely as these groups of heavenly graces!

1:11. We will make you borders of gold with studs of silver.

The borders of gold, with studs of silver, made for those who depend on the Spirit, include such jewels as, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control".

How much honour is given to the bride, and how strong the proof of His love, when the Beloved, the King, stoops to make these beautiful things Himself. He does not say "We will give", but "We will make". The virtues dressing the redeemed, the beauties of their souls, their spiritual bodies can be the workmanship of none less than Jesus Christ. And this is to Him a labour of love. His affection for us forbids the idea of trusting this work to other hands, even could any be found equal to the task. He makes all that is valuable and beautiful about us.

1:12. **While the king sits at his table,**

We meet with Jesus by grace showered on the soul in the enjoyment of public services, especially the sacred feast of the Supper. Here, His society is enjoyed not in private fellowship, His rooms, but in public, at His table, in the circle of His friends.

We find not seldom on coming to the table of the sacred feast, the King of saints there refreshing us with the hidden manna for the hungry soul, with the water of life for the thirsting spirit, and with golden incense containers alive with holy fire and heavenly incense for kindling again the smouldering affections of the heart.

Sitting together at table was evidence of peace and friendship.

In the Lord's supper we are sharing, in the only way now possible, in the sacrifice once for all offered on Calvary; and while doing this, show the Lord's death, until He comes.

Now at the communion table, in the congregation, and where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there in the influences of the Holy Spirit.

my spikenard sends out the smell of it.

In this fellowship with Christ, our presence is as agreeable to Him as the fragrance of spikenard.

The graces of the holy heart, so acceptable to God, are the work of the Spirit. He brings to us, in this wilderness, from the hills of frankincense on high, those graces of liquid perfume which arise from the vessel of a heart broken in repentance, in scents of prayers, desires, and affections, most grateful to this kingly Friend. Love, holiness, all the desires unfolding purity of heart, are the things well pleasing to our Redeemer. Every approach of our Lord brings with it an influence which, by livening the affections, draws out the precious breathings of the spikenard of the heart.

In the sacred feast of the supper we are merely expressing by ceremonies that which it is our privilege and duty continually to enjoy. Not the communion service only, but our whole life, is a continual sacred feast. As such, this feast may preserve our affections always in a glow, by keeping us near to Christ.

1:13. A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved to me; which shall lie all night in my bosom.

We would read this passage, My beloved is to me as a bag, or delicate vessel, filled with liquid myrrh, that is carried continually in the bosom. Myrrh was one of the most costly and fragrant perfumes. Rich perfume very fittingly pictures the influences of the

Holy Spirit; and what can illustrate more beautifully than this, those Divine influences dropped as dew from the mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense, and lying with a preserving power and inspiring fragrance in the very bosom of the soul, the centre of the spiritual heart.

Lodged at the bottom of the heart, like a bunch of liquid or crushed myrrh, the love of Jesus, the truths, thoughts, comforts, and influences of the Holy Spirit, breathe and roll through all the channels of the soul, with a soothing, inspiring power, and spread there as much as is now possible to be enjoyed of heaven.

1:14. My beloved is to me as a bunch of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.

To persons familiar with these beautiful and fragrant bunches, nothing could be more expressive of the loveliness of the presence of another, even of the Lord Jesus Christ. How could we express otherwise, or more intelligibly, than by these figures, the awareness had of Jesus as lodged in our hearts by His love, and of that love as stored by us, and the source of inexpressible pleasure.

The love of Christ, His comforts and joys, are to us not unsteady and quickly fading, like fragrance floating on a passing breeze; but are, in the depths

of the soul, a continual fountain of inspiring perfumes, refreshing as myrrh, beautiful as the bunches of camphire.

The promises and Scripture truths gathered from time to time, from different parts of the word of God, and carried in our bosom, in bunches, as we need them, are the bunches of camphire, flowering and fragrant with the love of Jesus.

The wind loaded with such fragrance as the myrrh and camphire blooms, is the best illustration of the Holy Spirit in His office of bringing to the soul the inspiring love of our Lord. While the presence of Christ spreads a pure and uplifting influence through the soul, from the influences of the Holy Spirit gathered like liquid myrrh at our heart, it also satisfies the sight by visions more delicately beautiful than the flowers of the camphire.

1:15. **See, you are fair, my love; see, you are fair;**

Feeling our corruption and knowing our shortcomings, we wonder what there can be in us to admire; but He sees beyond the outward appearance, and notices what is beautiful in the heart. We are grafted into Christ; and as we become more and more one with Him, our beauty increases by His beauty becoming ours. As soon as born again, the soul begins to be made like Christ.

We are made one with Christ by acceptance as righteous; and being made holy then transfers to our soul the excellences existing in Jesus.

you have doves' eyes.

As the Spirit changes us to His own likeness, and makes us harmless, without deceit, or pure, as doves, the eyes must gain an expression like the eyes of doves. The eye speaking gentleness, purity, and love, is the expression of face agreeable to our Lord.

1:16. See, you are fair, my beloved,

We love Him because He first loved us; we are bold to call Him our Beloved, because He first calls us His love. It is much for such unworthy creatures to have the right of saying this; much to have the feelings and desires which urge this language. "You are fair." How fair? Fairer than the sons of men; dressed with greater beauty than any of our fallen race; fairer too than the angels.

yes, pleasant:

The society of Jesus, far from being gloomy and wearying, is captivating and delightful. In Him are united all imaginable charms, princely dignity,

mind of unlimited reach, limitless influence, beauty, knowledge, and wisdom Divine, a nature that is itself love. When in the flesh, emptied of His glory, there was a wonderful charm about His person, His presence, His conversation. What, therefore, must be the charm clothing Him now in glory.

How pleasant is the society of Jesus, when He unfolds to us the way of salvation, opens the promises, encourages in difficulty, comforts in trouble, and speaks of the blessedness of heaven! Charmed with His pleasantness, captivated with His wisdom, and carried away by the glorious visions of the ideal world unfolded by His promises, we exclaim, "This is my rest for ever; here will I live. Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none on earth that I desire beside You".

also our bed is green.

The word *bed* here expresses the place where, in a country scene, the two friends may sit on the grass, and share the pleasures of each other's company. We would read, Our couch or place of rest is spread with the grass and flowers of spring. By such scenes as this, would the Holy Spirit picture that in our communion with Jesus we are surrounded with pleasantness and peace. The curse cannot invade on the spot where the Lamb slain rests with His redeemed; the earth, cursed for

the disobedience of the first Adam, receives through the righteousness of the second Adam, a deliverance from the bondage of corruption; the first fruits of which we now feel gathering around us in hours of communion with Jesus.

How sweet is our rest when we sit down with Him in the hour of repentance, in times of refreshing, in seasons of prayer, under His gracious providences, in the services of the church.

1:17. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.

Our place of rest, while so beautiful, is not open to the rays of the sun, nor to the rain, but is protected by a shelter, a roof with rafters of cedar, and a ceiling of fir or cypress. The idea seems to be, that the bride was enjoying this pleasant society of the beloved, sitting on a bed of grass and spring flowers, over which was spread the protection of a ceiling of lasting materials, and open on every side to the pleasing prospects and mild airs.

That protection is nothing less than the Divine nature of Jesus Christ. Nothing can harm us beneath this heavenly shade. Evil, Satan, suffering, death, the chill dews of sin, cannot strike us there. In the cloud threatening with anger over our guilty world, the angel of death, the minister of Divine justice, has his stand; but from his arrows of death,

our pardoned spirits are more secure than she, who rested with the beloved under this ceiling, was from the withering rays of the sun. While the Divine nature of Christ is our glorious covering, He in whom lives all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, communes with us through the human nature of Jesus Christ.

This shelter can never decay: He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

2:1. I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

The bride is evidently speaking of herself in a modest, humble manner; and the figures of the rose and lily, therefore, illustrate the Christian character as possessing a beauty in which delicacy, humility, and purity, are leading features.

Godliness refines our whole nature. It is a cleansing from the coarseness and defilement of sin. It purifies the heart, the motives, the views, the desires, the soul. This purity sheds through all our powers, and all our actions, an increasing and delightful delicacy of sentiment, thought, and feeling. Coarseness of feeling, as well as of language and of action, is the offspring of the impurity of sin, and must disappear under the purifying energy of Divine grace.

Love being the fruit which holiness bears in the heart, humility is the root by which it is fed. Our godliness may ever be judged by our humility. In hidden retreats of the country, in humble meadows, the rose and the lily find a kindly soil. Like the lily of the valleys, the godly soul is clothed with a loveliness combining purity with delicacy and humility.

2:2. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

The saint must expect to find himself, while in this world, among unkind and hostile spirits. Our position is surrounded with those whose evil passions, pride, scorn, envy, hatred, greed, lust, spite, bristling from their hearts on every side, make it difficult for us to move without meeting something keener than thorns or drawn swords, by which deep and painful wounds are inflicted on the delicate sensibility of the heavenward spirit. As much care is necessary in dealing with the wicked, as in handling a thorn bush; yet will those who use the greatest care, often find themselves wounded. Even in Christian countries, the hearts of the wicked are armed with as fierce passions against godliness and the godly, as at any former age. Ignorant of the true state of things here, we

expect too much of the world, and by this injure our peace.

2:3. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

The citron tree seems to be the one here intended. The name is drawn from the fragrance it gives out. The leaves are continual; there is no time, not even mid-winter, when there may not be seen on it an abundance of flowers; there is throughout the year a continual series of blossoms, young fruit, and ripe fruit, at the same time; the fruit was of the colour of gold, very pleasant to the taste, very fragrant, and reviving to those who were ready to faint. The shade of this tree is deep and refreshing. Such a tree, therefore, as the citron, standing among the trees of the forest, must be an object of highest beauty and strong attraction.

With the beauty and majesty of the citron-tree, Jesus towers above all others, in the unlimited glory of His Divinity, as the Son of God.

I sat down under his shadow with great delight,

He is the shade of His people. Exposed to the full blaze of the justice of Him who is a consuming fire, we must be blasted and destroyed, did not Christ

spread between us and Him whose jealousy burns like fire, His own Divine nature. When the soul feels the agonies of conviction for sin, how felt is the change, how reviving the shelter, as we pass under the shadow of the cross, and feel around us the refreshing influences of the righteousness of Christ.

and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The apple tree yielded a wealth of the richest fruits in uninterrupted abundance. Its fruit was highly valued as sweet to the taste, of refreshing fragrance. With richer fruits than these does Jesus satisfy the soul who rests under His shadow. He alone can satisfy the cravings of the heart.

2:4. He brought me to the feasting house,

The house of wine, a place beautified with every ornament, and stored with every thing refreshing and delightful. Here, our living-place is among walls formed of Divine goodness; our light is the glory of the Spirit's presence; our food is the hidden manna; our cup salvation; our drink the new wine of the heavenly kingdom; our anointing the oil of gladness; our ministering attendants angels; and the banner over us is love.

When the Spirit's influences are so spread through the soul as to support its life, we may be said to feed on His grace. There is literally such a thing as feeding on truth; and the place where these spiritual supplies are enjoyed in abundance, may well be called the feasting house. Here we feast on the riches of redeeming love.

and his banner over me was love.

He brings us to this feast, with the rejoicing of a conqueror returning in triumph with a loved one taken from the power of an enemy. Jesus delivered us from bondage to the powers of darkness.

As the flag shows to what country we belong, so by love we are shown to be citizens of heaven. As the banner of his country is an object of honourable pride to the good citizen, so the saint glories only in the cross of Christ, and in possessing by this the Divine love. When he who has fought the good fight, and endured hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, finds the dimness of death on his eye, and its coldness on his heart, how will his spirit revive on seeing over him this banner of love!

2:5. Stay me with jugs, comfort me with apples:

that is, Give me support and refresh me with cups of wine from the feasting house, and with citrons from the tree whose shadow was so delightful. The fruits with which the soul desires to be refreshed, are the precious doctrines of the cross and the promises of the Scriptures. The simple doctrines of the cross are sweeter than our daily food.

for I am sick with love.

The Holy Spirit may so fill the heart with His influences as to make us literally "sick with love"; purifying our power of awareness, and stirring up impossible to control desires for seeing more of our Lord. As hope put off makes the heart sick, these longing desires run ahead of our enjoyment, and, indeed, of our capability of enjoying Jesus; and these desires, so unsatisfied, make us sick with love. "Hearts sick with the desire of heaven, and the blessedness of that state".

At such hours, we wish to pour out before the blessed Saviour the precious perfume of the affections from the vessel of a broken spirit; and as we lie prostrate before Him, weeping, kiss those feet which have been wounded for us, and bathe them with our tears. The sense of God's amazing goodness, of His tenderness to such unworthiness as ours, this it is that overcomes us, and makes us weep. We are so sweetly subdued. We sink down

in overpowering humility, because overcome with melting love. "My guilt is all transferred; He has cancelled all I owed. Yet I could weep for sins against so good a God: it seems to me as if there must be weeping even in heaven for sin".

2:6. His left hand is under my head,

We then feel sweetly supported by the Lord Jesus, by His credited righteousness, and by His inward grace. His righteousness is mighty to save even to the utmost all who come to Him, however great their unworthiness and guilt.

and his right hand embraces me.

While so supporting us, Jesus draws us very near to Himself. "He gives His saints a view of His face, shining with the brightest love, kisses them with the kisses of His mouth, admits them to the most winning, shared fellowship of hidden love with Himself; and plentifully sheds widely His love in their hearts".

2:7. I charge you, Oh you daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor waken my love, until he please.

The believer enjoying the evidences of heavenly love, will be as cautious in avoiding sin, as in watching the gazelle, which bounds away at the rustling of a leaf. Nothing could express more strongly with what carefulness the repentant heart seeks to keep those influences of the Spirit and the society of Jesus. Never have we such intense anxiety in guarding against sin, as when so filled with intense love.

2:8. The voice of my beloved!

When we have been passing through a season of coldness and decline, how often have we been sweetly surprised by an influence coming over the heart, we could hardly tell from where, or how, warming the heart, drawing the attention back to the forgotten Saviour, inclining us to prayer, and giving evidence of the return of Jesus.

There is a something speaking to the soul; Spirit whispering to spirit; tones from the lips of Jesus, fitted to the hearing ear of the renewed soul. Faith gives us the best kind of evidence, that this is indeed the voice of our Lord.

**see, he comes leaping on the
mountains, skipping on the hills.**

He comes over all difficulties to visit and revive us; rising above all obstacles with ease.

Nothing, whether the inward sense of unworthiness and guilt, increased by numerous backslidings, or outward sorrows rising around us, dark and towering as the steep rocks of the valley of the shadow of death, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

2:9. My beloved is like a roe or a young deer:

He comes to us speedily, unexpectedly. The roe was a figure of swiftness. Though keeping afar off for a time, He comes speedily. When churches long thirsting for the revival of His work have almost fainted under the thought that their sins and unworthiness were so great as to exclude them, perhaps for ever, from the blessing; He has been found among them, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers on the grass.

see, he stands behind our wall,

We are, as offenders against God, cut off from uniting with the world of spirits, from knowledge of its mysteries, from views of its greatness and glories. Jesus now kindly visits us in our separation. But dark walls of our prison come between - the

walls of our earthly house of this tent, the walls that rise between us and the invisible world. How far is Jesus removed from me? He is standing behind this wall. This it is, and this only, which prevents us from having full view of Him, from coming very near to Him, from hearing clearly His voice.

he looks in at the windows, showing himself through the lattice.

The services, the sacred feasts, the Scriptures, form the lattice through which we now get glimpses of the Beloved, and are made able to see beauties unfolding, and breathe inspiring fragrance, which thrill the soul with assurance of the measureless fullness waiting us among the glories of heaven.

2:10. My beloved spoke, and said to me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

So the Lord Jesus encourages us, by presenting to the mind the attractiveness of heaven as a place clothed with more than the beauties of Eden. We had thought that He left us because we had driven away His love by sin, and He was displeased by our many corruptions. His first words are, that He loves us as ever, and rejoices in our society as the bridegroom rejoices in the society of his loved

one. Such being His love, He wishes to have us with Him where He is, that there may be nothing to break the interchange of affection between Him and our souls.

Much is said of the desire of the saint to depart and be with Jesus. We should think more of the desire of Jesus to have the believer depart and be with Him in glory. The saint cannot be so desirous for being in heaven, as Jesus is for having us with Him in heaven. He wishes us to walk with Him by the living fountains of waters, in the spring landscape of the heavenly world.

2:11. **For, look, the winter is past,**

In the broad and open regions of that world which lies beyond the walls of our present condition, separating us from the Beloved, the winter is past. There, the reign of sin, the effect of man's guilt, as seen in the very ground, of which winter is so sad an evidence, is no more seen. In that kingdom of blessedness, there shall be no more curse. In that world to which Jesus is drawing us, the ground is no longer cursed for the sake of man; there, are no long chilling nights, no pelting storms, no numbing winds, no lightning and hail, snow and vapours, stormy blasts fulfilling the word of an angry God. The winter has so passed away from the face of nature in that happy world, because the soul of

man, on account of whose sin the curse fell on the ground, has been delivered from all his sin; his home is all pure and glorious, because his spiritual leprosy has been cleansed. No hurricanes of passion can there burst on the soul; no gusts of sin sweep over the heart; no thunderbolts of guilt shatter our peace; no unhealthy growth blight our hopes; no cancer prey on the objects of our delight; no frosts chill the budding affections; no withering blasts spread ruin over our prospects, or freeze the currents of joy.

the rain is over *and* gone;

The believer must pass through many pelting storms of distress and suffering, which, though for the present not joyous but sorrowful, are necessary for ripening in our souls the peaceable fruit of righteousness. As the latter rain was the herald of spring and the forerunner of harvest, the Divine punishments are the closing evils connected with sin and the heralds of coming peace in heaven. These must be done away when we reach that world where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes"; where the rain is over and gone.

2:12. the flowers appear on the earth;

Spring is the living illustration to fallen man of the truth, that there shall be a like resurrection from the barrenness which the curse has spread over our world. And when told that in the future world the flowers appear in the earth as the attendants of an eternal spring, we feel nothing could picture to us more pleasingly that there the curse on the ground is cancelled, and the face of nature clothed with the attractive beauty of Paradise. Nor will the flowers there appearing in the earth soon wither under summer's heat, and fall under winter's frost; they will bloom unfading, not decaying, throughout a spring which shall fill the whole reach of a cycle boundless as eternal life.

**the time of the singing of *birds* is
come,**

Man is not capable of richer pleasure than is felt in hearing delightful music. It has its foundation in the human soul. No one enjoys music with such perfect delight as the believer made holy. In the world to which Jesus would attract us, "the time of singing is come"; the time of mourning and weeping has been done away. The mind can think of nothing more glorious than the worship of the heavenly host as opened to us in the visions at Patmos. Some saints seem to have caught swells of those harmonies before these walls of separation had yet

gone entirely down in death; and they were caught away with the sound.

and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land;

The dove was the figure of affection; and its mention here rather than any other, is for showing that the key-note of the harmonies of that better land is love. There will be heard music; the harmonies rising from a vast choir, which no man can number, of hearts perfect in love.

2:13. the fig tree puts out her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The heavenly paradise is delightful, and there too grows the tree of life. All that can feast the eye and refresh the senses is there spread out. The new wine which Jesus wills to drink with the saints in His Father's kingdom, is even now waiting us.

How attractive is heaven as so pictured. Every thing in abundance that can refresh and delight the powers of both body and soul. Therefore, from that world of holiness and joy, does Jesus say to us, "Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away".

2:14. Oh my dove, who is in the openings of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs,

Those whom Jesus would attract away to Himself, are very often found in the rugged scenes of life, in situations of trial, suffering, and neglect, alone, away from the world. Those whom God would redeem, whose corruptions He would uproot, He cuts off from love of the world, by putting them in the openings of the rock; He brings us, like Israel, "through the wilderness", that we may desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.

If now He withdraws us not from the world, He carries out the same end in spreading emptiness around us, by death, by loss of property, by suffering, by blasted hopes and bitter disappointments.

let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your face is lovely.

The person so addressed as in the opening of the rock, was so affected with a sense of unworthiness, as to draw back and stand in need of the urging to come out to her Lord.

My dove, my tender, timid one, the object of my deepest, most devoted love, "let me see your face",

for however the world may disregard and despise that expression of humility, in My eyes the face speaking repentance is beautiful. Let me hear your voice, for it is sweet. No sounds are so delightful to Jesus, as the tones of the repentant spirit confessing sin, mourning the absence of His face, calling on Him in trouble, and seeking advance in holiness.

2:15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

Jackals, little foxes, here stand for any thing which injures, by underhand and cunning, the graces of those who are the objects of Divine love. Those who are favoured richly with grace, and whom our Lord is drawing towards heaven, will be careful to guard against sin, and especially against little sins. We are anxious to guard the vineyard of the heart against the inroad of any thing, however small, that may eat away and destroy our graces. Never is our carefulness in guarding against sin so great, as when most deeply filled with the love of Jesus; against the slightest sins we wish most carefully to guard.

By little sins, Satan begins the most deadly temptations; and the time for resisting him, is at the very beginning of his cunning attacks. Enjoyment in

what may seem small departures from watchfulness and duty, blinds the mind to the truth of Scripture, eats into and weakens our graces, and saddens the Holy Spirit.

2:16. My beloved is mine, and I am his:

We are permitted to feel that whatever else is lacking, Christ is ours. To the degree we surrender ourselves up to Him, will we ever find Him giving to us His grace and causing us to receive of His fullness.

he feeds among the lilies.

The beloved, still compared to a gazelle, is here said to feed in green pastures abounding with lilies. As in 2:1,2, the lilies are figures of the pure in heart, the virgins surrounding the beloved. The place of our Lord's strongest desire is in the middle of His saints; and however He may withdraw, to that place He will most certainly return.

There, is the place where He is drawn by the strongest desire. We may count without mistake on His returning at periods, to reveal His presence in His Church; He can never forget the calm retreats of this world, where gather His chosen ones robed in the purity of holiness. In times of darkness and sorrow, let us therefore be comforted by the

inward assurance, "My beloved is mine and I am his"; and by feeling that more certainly than the roe to his rich pastures among the lilies, will Jesus return to visit and stay with our longing hearts.

2:17. Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be you like a roe or a young deer on the mountains of Bether.

The desire of our heart is that Jesus would repeat visits as often as possible, until the darkness now around us flees away. As the Hebrew word *Bether* means a section or division, and as it occurs nowhere else as a proper name, we take "mountains of Bether" here to mean mountains of division. As Jesus sees fit sometimes to withdraw, we pray for the repetition of his visits to the soul as often as possible. These visits are necessary for our advancement in holiness; they are both sunlight and shower. Although we cannot at present be with Him among the glories of heaven, He will come often, over all obstacles in between, and visit us surrounded by the darkness and ruins of earth, "until the day breaks and the shadows flee away".

3:1. By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves:

This verse is connected with the close of chapter second, and illustrates the earnestness of the soul in seeking Jesus during a time of His absence. In the absence of Jesus, we seek Him with desires so strong as to rise above the most necessary cravings of the body, even sleep.

I sought him, but I found him not.

The absence of a sense of the presence of Jesus is no evidence God has cast us off, and is displeased. Many good people mistake at such time, by despairing and accusing themselves, instead of seeking Him. Through the inclination to walk by sense or sight, rather than by faith, they lose heart when the evidences of the presence of Jesus are withheld.

But they should feel the absence of these is no proof of lack of acceptance; these withdrawals are for a wise end, and are essential in our preparation for heaven. They test the strength of our faith and steadfastness of our love; they lead to deeper searching for secret sins; they advance humility by making us feel our weakness and our dependence on God. If this inward spring of Divine influence flowed without a break, in a current always full, we would be in danger of spiritual pride.

How unreasonable to doubt the love of a friend when necessarily withdrawn: to love him only when

under our eye is a sign of infant-like weakness. How longs and seeks the soul for Christ, in times of temptation, of trial, of suffering, of spiritual loneliness! When mourning the absence of Him whom our soul loves, how often have we made our bed to swim, and watered our couch with tears.

"Our duty in this case is to persevere in our enquiries after the Lord Christ, in prayer, deep thought, mourning, reading, and hearing of the word, in all appointments of Divine worship, private and public, in diligent obedience, until we find Him, or He return to us, as in former days."

3:2. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves: I sought him, but I found him not.

The heart warmed with thoughts of Him, like a spring, boiling or bubbling up with deep emotions, drives us to seek Him in the way of self-denial. Every thing else is left, even sleep itself sacrificed, for finding the presence of Jesus. A sense of the presence of Christ is missing. In such times of loneliness and trial the soul seeks Him with great earnestness; periods of conflict, peril, and sorrow. In his passage onward to heaven, every believer has to pass through the valley of the shadow of death; some find it darker and more terrible than

others. There are times of outward emptiness and inward trial.

3:3. The watchmen who go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw you him whom my soul loves?

The loneliness and gloom of the bride wandering at night through the streets, deserted by all except the watchmen, sets out the darkness and emptiness of the soul searching for Christ in these times of loneliness and trial. The watchmen have the important trust of guarding the interests of the Church, warning of danger, instructing and comforting troubled souls. Their aid must we seek in times of darkness and sorrow. They are expected to know more than others about experienced religion; their duty is to study this as the end of all their searches.

3:4. It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loves:

Jesus is always to be found near the watchmen, the ministry, the means of grace. Some truth shines out suited to our need, some promise precisely suited to our lack, some warning that may waken us from danger.

**I held him, and would not let him go,
until I had brought him into my mother's house,
and into the room of her who conceived me.**

In this and in the other passage where reference is made to the mother and the mother's rooms, see 8:2, this is evidently for guarding against the idea of any thing improper in this love. In the house and under the eye of a mother, a virgin must be supposed under the very best safeguard against any thing like improper conduct. The love here intended is that pure, ideal affection, not entirely like any thing known on earth, which combines the earnest affection of the marriage relation with the devotion of a brother's and sister's heart, without any unholy feeling joined with it.

So finding Jesus, we are anxious to commune with him in secret. Here we are set forward as naturally drawing Him into private communion, seeking fellowship with Him by prayer. We wish, after deliverance from spiritual loneliness, to have Jesus much to ourselves in study of the Scriptures, in deep thought, in sorrow for sin, and in secret prayer.

**3:5. I charge you, Oh you daughters of
Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the**

**field, that you stir not up, nor waken my love,
until he please.**

Seeking so to enjoy confidential fellowship with Jesus where there may be no interference, the soul again expresses anxiety to guard against any thing likely to make Him withdraw.

3:6. Who is this who comes out of the wilderness

Discouraged because He left us, as in v.1, we are told that however we may seem forsaken, we may be sure our souls are during the darkest hours in a chariot paved with love. As though He says to us, Do not lose heart under the heaviest trials, for you are on your road to glory in a carriage guarded by angels, surrounded with the prayers of Christ, and made of materials precious as love. We are in our way to meet Him in His glorified body, when we shall be made like Him by having a spiritual body. The region lying between this world and the world where Jesus glorified is awaiting His saints, is certainly a lonely wilderness. The angels standing at the gates and on the walls of the New Jerusalem, see this procession coming up towards the Holy City, and are filled with wonder.

like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Those pillars are the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness glorious to the consideration, mighty to save. In His righteousness is included all that He did and suffered for us in obtaining salvation. We would understand by these pillars of incense, both what He did on earth, His righteousness, and what He is now doing in heaven, His pleading. The saint is passing onward to glory, surrounded and protected by both these.

His pleading for us is continual in our progress through this world towards heaven. Therefore we have always an answer in the heavenly holy place to the slanders of Satan, and may be assured of acceptance with God through Him whose offering is to the Father of a sweet smelling scent.

3:7,8. See his bed, which is Solomon's;

The word "bed" here means a kind of portable chair or open vehicle, in which persons in the East are carried on men's shoulders. Such was the means of carrying the bride to the house of the bridegroom. The saint is here pictured as passing onward in a carriage, chariot, or whatever called, towards heaven. As it is a chariot for the soul, this

cannot be seen any more than the soul. When by withdrawing at death the film of corruption now over them, our eyes are opened, we shall find our souls in a bridal chariot, in which, from the moment of new birth, we have been moving onward to the arms of our beloved Lord.

sixty mighty men are about it, of the mighty of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night.

Around the saint are enemies lying in ambush among the gloom veiling from us the invisible world, and anxious to do us every possible injury. The holy angels are our guard against these. They are sent from heaven as a guard, an escort for us during our passage through this wilderness to heaven.

3:9,10. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.

The word "chariot" here is explanatory of "bed" in v.7, and means a chair, a portable couch, or carriage. The object of these verses is to set before us the remarkable beauty and excellence of the carriage provided by Solomon for his bride.

He made the pillars of it of silver, the bottom of it of gold, the covering of it of purple;

The believer is carried onward to heaven in a carriage as costly and glorious as that here described; the materials are of the richest, choicest, most lasting character. The preparation made, the means provided for bringing us to glory, are of a rare and splendid nature.

the middle of it being paved *with love*, for the daughters of Jerusalem.

The many acts of Divine love from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, combining underneath us like the different pieces in a beautiful patterned, inlaid pavement. The souls of the redeemed pass up towards glory in this precious chariot of salvation, pillowed on love, surrounded by an escort of angels, among pillars of incense of the prayers of our Divine Redeemer, and wrapped in the glory of the righteousness of the sacrifice offered for us on the altar of the Divine nature of Christ.

3:11. Go forward, Oh you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him in the day of his marriage, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.

These words show the reception waiting us on our arrival in heaven. While the majestic procession just noticed is coming up through the wilderness, the Prince of Peace is standing ready to receive us with all the gladness of a marriage feasting. The daughters of Zion, a general expression for the people of heaven, while gazing on this sight, are called on to see the glory of the appearance of Jesus and of His attendants as waiting His redeemed in glory. Jesus is crowned with many crowns. But on the reception of His ransomed ones, there is special fitness in mentioning only the marriage crown.

We naturally enquire, How will Jesus receive me on my approach to heaven? The answer is here. He is waiting us, clothed with all the glory of heaven, and with the affection of the bridegroom receiving the bride. That time will be a day of marriage feasting; His soul triumphing in having finished the work of redemption by the destruction of even the last enemy death, and in having nothing from now on, but the uninterrupted enjoyment of the society of the bride, the wife of the Lamb.