

# The Song of Solomon

**Henry Law**

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### Editor's Preface

Henry Law's little commentary on the Song of Solomon, first published in 1879, remains one of the most accessible devotional commentaries available today. Law (1797–1884) was an evangelical Anglican clergyman, and his verse-by-verse commentary was written for his own congregation, to cultivate warm Christian affection for the Lord Jesus and to encourage prayerful communion with Him.

Law took a deliberate approach, avoiding technical, linguistic, and historical analysis and focusing on practical devotional lessons. The framework for Law's reading of the text is allegorical; he says, "allegory follows on to allegory." He does not, however, overspiritualise; rather, he finds the most direct path from the text to Christ. Law's Christological depth in this commentary makes it an indispensable resource for the student of the Song of Solomon today.

First, Law's fundamental premise is that the Holy Spirit intentionally gave the Song of Solomon to reveal Christ. For Law, the vivid imagery of kisses, the garden imagery, the natural beauty in the descriptive poems, and the mutual love were tools of the Holy Spirit to help us focus on Christ. Second, Law interprets the Song of Solomon primarily through the lens of marriage. He develops the Church as a vineyard and Christ standing at the door, but mainly the marriage theme. The image of the bridegroom and the bride in the Song of Solomon depicts "how Christ loves the Church and gives himself for it; and how the Church loves Christ and gives herself to him."

Third, in this marriage relationship, Law develops in two directions. First, he emphasises the beauty and excellence of Christ, his intense love for his people, and his tenderness towards them. He speaks of the offices of Christ, the attributes of Christ's holiness and love, and his tenderness towards his people. Then Law highlights the believer's deep experiences and relationship with the Lord Jesus, their *knowledge* of the covenant union, and the importance of *feeling* that union. He draws out their inexpressible joy in his nearness, their spiritual longing for communion and closeness with the Lord, and the intense longing felt in his absence.

This edition of Law's work was prepared for pastors in rural Africa. The language has been modernised, the text edited, and Scripture references inserted where it is clear the author is citing or referring to

Scripture. This edition of Law's work is prepared with the prayer that the Lord would use it to enrich the reader's spiritual life and the preaching ministry of the Song of Solomon. Special thanks to Mrs Kim Schofield for her work on this project.

Editor

Aaron Dunlop, Director of *The Krapf Project*

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### **Preface**

The aim of this book is simple: to promote, elevate, and sanctify the communion of the saints; to give wings to piety and warmth to our prayers. The dull routine of religious life can too often shift from vibrant worship to fruitless formality. True worship, however, is the heavenward elevation of the soul, and it is worth every effort to maintain this.

Lessons from the Bible are essential to worship, and God's voice is heard in this book. It proclaims his salvation, reveals his will, and lays out his commands. Thus, it prepares the heart to approach God.

The language of this book is the language found throughout the Scripture. Here, as in other Scriptures, the attraction of the soul is described by the term "to draw." Similarly, the description of Bride and Bridegroom, of the Church as a vineyard, of Christ standing at the door, are all found in other Scriptures. The unity of thought and vocabulary, therefore, establishes divine authorship--and the Author is the Holy Spirit.

David's Hymn of Love, Psalm 45, is a miniature version of the Song of Songs. Solomon, his son, supplies the life-size portrait. The subject of this song has the power to elevate and transform the soul. It transports us to regions above earth.

In this Song, the mutual love between Christ and the Church is exhibited in a series of similitudes. Allegory follows on allegory, presenting a single picture of bridal love. The main desire of this exposition is to proclaim exclusively how Christ loves the Church, and gives Himself for it; and how the Church loves Christ, and gives herself to Him.

May the Holy Spirit, who reveals the glories of Christ Jesus in this book, guide us in reading it! May we not be distracted by the mists of earth! May devout hearts open their doors to receive the truth! May we advance with confidence that sanctifying grace will meet us in reading this Song, as in other Scriptures!



## Chapter 1

### **1:1. "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's."**

The Holy Spirit gives us the title to this book. Solomon, known for his wisdom and gifts above those of everyone else, is the inspired author. The song follows closely on the spiritual songs of David, his father, the sweet Psalmist of Israel (2 Samuel 23:1). Let us approach the text, therefore, with reverence, as it comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb. May it carry our thoughts above earth, and raise them to the purest light!

It is a Song. It is not a plain historical record, a veiled prophecy of the future, a scientific work on nature, or a set of moral rules for holy living.

As a song, it rises on the wings of metaphor and imagery. It uses imagination to clothe spiritual truths in poetic pictures. This invites vivid interpretation, yet within firm limits: we must draw only those lessons that sound judgment and clear truth support.

But this song is the Song of Songs. It surpasses all other expressions of love. May it be to us a rich feast; the joy of joys and the delight of delights. May our souls find in it overflowing heavenly joy, until we are so moved by it that we seem to sing at the very gate of heaven.

This Song reveals a great mystery: the close communion between Christ and His Church. Blessed are those who hear in the Bridegroom's words the love of Christ spoken personally to them. Blessed are those who can answer that the Bride's words are the true expression of their deepest experience.

### **1:2. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth; for Your love is better than wine."**

These opening words are abrupt and presuppose the Church's desire. The Church longs for a closer walk in the love of Christ. A kiss is evidence of the warm feelings of a loving parent, an affectionate brother, a tender spouse, or a devoted friend. The Church longs to be assured that she has a genuine and saving investment in Christ, and that his love for her is genuine and strong. This prayer is evident proof.

Through time spent in meditation, the Spirit draws the veil and shows us the Redeemer's heart. In the pages of Scripture, he persuades us of this love by indisputable facts. Why did Christ assume our nature, put on the rags of mortality, condescend to represent us as bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh? Why did he lay down his life to buy us from destruction? Why did he work out a perfect obedience to be our covering? Why does he reign at God's right hand for us?

It is because of his love. Love carries him through the whole work, and on every step is written, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." These are the indisputable facts we find in Scripture, and we can take these truths as the kisses of his mouth.

We cannot find more convincing evidence than this, and our response is, "Your love is better than wine." As wine cheers and refreshes, so these truths raise the soul to experience joys unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8). The love of Christ is a cup overflowing with delights that one cannot give.

**1:3. *"Your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out; therefore, virgins love you."***

Here, the Church (or the Christian) praises the Saviour who is fragrant in beautiful perfume. By faith, we see Jesus fulfilling the high offices necessary for our salvation, and by faith, we smell the anointing oil that has anointed him as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Prophet of the Church. He instructs us in all wisdom. He reveals saving truth, dispels ignorance, enlightens us with heavenly knowledge, and teaches us how to profit from the Word.

He is also anointed to be the High Priest of his Church. On the Altar of his Cross, he presented himself as the all-atoning victim, accomplishing in his person what was foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices. He bears his people on his shoulders and on his breast, and from the throne of heaven pours down blessings on them.

The Father declared, "I have set My King on my holy hill of Zion." He rules his people, ordering all things for their good. He rules in them, bringing every feeling into subjection. And soon he will reign as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

**1:4. *"Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you."***

The Church (and the Christian) desires the closest communion with her Lord. We feel our inability to advance, but we need him to draw us forward. He must stir our zeal; he must give us strength. We pray for help, and vow that if we are drawn by his love, we will run after him. By 'plural language' (we), she intimates that she will also draw others.

Prayers like this are not in vain. The Lord answers, and the result is her overflowing joy. She recognises that all other joys are nothing compared to the joy that comes from the Lord. To know Jesus is to love Him supremely. His true followers give him their undivided hearts; there is no competition.--"We love him because he first loved us."

**1:5. "I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon."**

The Church here holds communion with her friends. Believers maintain communion with the Lord, but it is also good to unwind in the freedom of Christian fellowship. We are strengthened by this and find brotherly support (Proverbs 27:17). This communion of saints is ordained by God for our good, and it pleases the Lord. Those who fear Him speak often to another, and he hears them and remembers them (Malachi 3:16).

So the Christian here turns to her friends. They are called "daughters of Jerusalem." She describes her condition as a seeming paradox. The extremes of both lowliness and greatness are combined.

"I am dark, but lovely." The "darkness" is a reference to weather skin (not skin pigmentation), because her brother made her work outside in the vineyard (vs. 5). But darkness is the symbol of our state by nature. We are conceived and born in sin, and sin is most ugly wherever it appears. The Spirit has revealed this truth to every believer. She sees it, she feels it, she owns it, and she grieves over it. It is his constant misery. When he does good, evil is present with him (Romans 7:21).

But she also looks to Christ. She sees the precious blood washing every stain. In Christ, she is whiter than the whitest snow. She puts on Christ, and adores him who was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

She sees her perfect obedience worked out as a robe to hide the ugliness of her sin, so bright, so lovely, and so glorious. She feels that this righteousness is only through God's grace imputed to her. She knows that she is lovely only because of divine loveliness, so that she can say, "I am dark, but lovely."

To symbolise this truth, she uses the tents of Kedar, which represent the vile condition of our sinful nature, whereas the curtains of Solomon symbolise the beautiful contrast. Kedar was the descendant of the wandering tribes that roamed throughout Arabia. They had no settled home. They drove their flocks from field to field, in search of pasture, with no place of rest. They had their shelter under the covering of the roughest and most unsightly tents. These tents, exposed to every change of weather, sometimes parched by heat, sometimes by frost, and composed of the coarsest animal skins, give an unpleasant appearance.

By contrast, Solomon's magnificent palace represented the riches and beauty of elaborate tapestries. What could be more lovely and attractive! These curtains shine as an emblem of the beauty of the Church (and the Christian), robed in heavenly glory.

**1:6. "Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!"**

The Church is seen standing low in the valley of self-renunciation—a place where true faith is learned, and blessed lessons are taught. Here we are trained to look honestly at our natural condition and to rejoice all the more deeply in the righteousness of Christ. We descend in humility so that we may rise in joyful love. We learn to distrust ourselves in order to adore our Lord more fully. Here we learn that “whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

Once more, the Church presents herself clothed in abasement. She appears like a peasant—wounded, neglected, and despised even by her own household. Driven from comfort, forced into degrading labour, and burned by the relentless sun, she knows her appearance offers nothing attractive. There is nothing in her that invites admiration, and so she shrinks from every gaze.

The lesson is plain and searching. It exposes the corruption of our natural state. All our righteousnesses are flawed, stained, and unfit for a holy God, like a filthy rag. If God were to mark every failure, who could stand? (Psalm 130:3). Every believer knows that in himself he is utterly corrupt, from head to foot, nothing remains but wounds and decay (Isaiah 1:6).

Yet this self-knowledge is precious when it drives us away from self-righteousness and toward the cleansing fountain of Christ's blood. Then the soul clings to the promise: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). We cry, “Do not look at me, because I am dark,” but also, “I am lovely—because God sees me clothed in the righteousness of Christ.”

But there is something else here. The Church adds, “My own vineyard I have not kept.” Every day, we neglect and wander from our duty. Our souls are like an untended vineyard—overgrown with weeds, broken fences. We sit idle when we should be diligent, as Paul lamented, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19).

**1:7. "Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?"**

The Church speaks to Christ in devotion, “O You whom my soul loves.” Consider his love—unchanging and eternal. It is displayed in the work of redemption and continues in his prayers for us above. We confess with Peter, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (John 21:17).

The Church declares her longing for intimate communion with him. His presence is her supreme joy, and his absence leaves her empty. He leads his flock to rich pastures that nourish and strengthen, and he shelters them from danger and gives them rest. She wants to know where this place is. Like Job, she cries, “Oh, that I knew where I might find him” (Job 23:3).

She is also afraid of being led astray: “Why should I be like one who wanders beside the flocks of Your companions?” From the beginning, false guides have troubled the people of God and can still lead our souls into error (1 John 4:1). For these false prophets, the pulpit is not a place of blessing but a dangerous place.

**1:8. *“If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your young goats by the shepherds’ tents.”***

The Lord does not leave the Church without an answer. A tender word reveals how deeply he loves her. Though she confessed her darkness, he sees only her beauty. He sees her clothed in robes of his own spotless righteousness and enriched with the graces of his Holy Spirit.

Yet with gentle kindness, he also reproves her for not knowing what she should have known. Philip received a similar rebuke, “Have I been with you so long, and still you do not know me?” (John 14:9).

Clear guidance is given, then, and she is instructed to look at the path of the faithful—observe how the holiest saints have lived and walked, and follow in their steps. Paul could say, “be imitators of me” (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are instructed to remain close to faithful ministers. In this way, we will “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

**1:9. *“I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots.”***

He addresses the church with affection. Words of love should not surprise us, for he was willing to descend to our lowly condition and to claim us as his bride forever. He declares, “I have compared you, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots.” In this striking image, he sets the beauty, excellence, and surpassing worth of the Church before us.

The picture calls to mind the horses chosen for Pharaoh’s chariots. The horse stands as a noble and majestic creature—admired for its graceful motion and remarkable strength. How extraordinary, then, must those horses have been that were selected for the service of Egypt’s king, chosen above all others for splendour and power.

The horses appointed for Pharaoh’s chariots were surely the finest the

world could supply. They were gathered from distant lands for the royal stables. So also the Church is drawn from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. From east and west, from north and south.

These horses were purchased at great cost. So also, the Church has been bought at the highest price imaginable—not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Who can measure its worth? All the riches of the earth, its gold and silver, its works of art and science, fade into nothing beside it. When Christ laid down His life, he gave all that heaven could give—there was no greater price to pay.

**1:10. "Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels."**

These horses are not only chosen but richly ornamented. Their heads gleam with precious jewels and chains of gold. In the same way, the Church is arrayed with the priceless gifts of grace. The Holy Spirit, by his power, enriches her with the beauty of holiness and the ornaments of godliness. All who see her must confess that she has been lifted far above the condition of fallen nature. He is never sparing in his generosity, but delights to beautify the bride of Christ.

**1:11. "We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver."**

The ornaments of these horses already appear perfect, as though nothing more could be added. Yet still richer adornments follow, highlighting the truth that "he gives more grace" (James 4:6). Let us therefore never rest satisfied with present achievements. Let us press on—labouring, striving, and praying—until we are filled with all the fullness of God. Even at our best, we must confess how far short we fall. Let holy dissatisfaction drive us on to continual dependence. Let us give our God no rest, but plead that grace upon grace may increasingly enrich and beautify our hearts.

**1:12. "While the King was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance."**

Here is another image full of instructions. The King is seated in his banquet hall, the table filled with good things. Beside him sits the Queen, clothed in royal garments and smelling of costly perfume. The scene reveals the truth that Christ desires fellowship with his church. He invites her to his table to share communion with Him. We read in Revelation, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Revelation 3:21).

What astonishing grace, that we should be welcomed to such a feast! Through his Spirit, his grace, the Scriptures, and the ordinances of the gospel, he calls us to a feast. Here, the soul is refreshed with his everlasting love. Here we grow in the knowledge of his incarnation. Here we learn that his flesh is truly food and His blood truly drink (John

6:53). Here, strength is drawn from precious promises, and as we feast, we hear his voice saying, “eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Song of Solomon 5:1).

This has a great effect on the soul that shares in communion with Christ—“While the King sat at His table, my perfume spread its fragrance.” The power of Christ’s presence awakens and strengthens grace. There is no smell from a garden in the cold of winter. It is lifeless, no colour, no fragrance, no beauty. But return when it is summer, and suddenly flowers bloom, and the air is filled with sweetness.

So it is with the soul. When Christ seems absent, the heart becomes barren and cold. But when He draws near in renewing power, his grace revives and blossoms, and it sends out a holy fragrance. It is like when Mary broke her alabaster box of ointment, and the house was filled with the perfume of her offering (Matthew 26:7).

**1:13, 14. *“My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi.”***

The Church knows the source from which her graces spring. If fragrance rises from her life, it is because his love has first infused it. If she shines with light, it is because she reflects the light of Christ. If she brings joy, it comes from Christ, who has so freely given us joy.

Every grace within us is but the aroma of his indwelling presence, and she confesses that her Beloved is to her a sachet of myrrh and a cluster of the choicest henna blossoms.

As rich perfume refreshes, so Jesus is the supreme joy of every believing heart. Every affection is captivated as we contemplate his beauty and his glory. The Church resolves then that nothing will steal her joy. The sachet of myrrh, the cluster of henna blossoms, will rest all night between her breasts. She will press her Beloved close to her heart. His presence brings happiness to her by day, and when night falls, she sees only him. He will stay near, filling her quiet hours with the fragrance of His love.

**1:15. *“Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.”***

Once more, Christ speaks with admiration for his church, with delight, and declares, “How beautiful you are, my beloved—how beautiful!” The repetition deepens the warmth of his affection.

Alongside the sense of depravity and worthlessness that we have seen previously, there are truths, no less vital, that we should always remember. In the depths of self-abasement, we hear the Lord say, “How beautiful you are, my beloved—how beautiful!”

This is contrary to reason, yet we believe it through faith, guided by Scripture, from the heart of the Saviour. Seen in Christ, is there anything more lovely than a soul washed in His blood? This righteousness is granted to all who believe, and within it there is no stain or blemish. Christ beholds his bride clothed in this righteousness and again proclaims, “How beautiful you are, my beloved—how beautiful!”

He also rejoices in the Spirit’s work in her heart. How lovely is this fruit of the Spirit! Jesus sees these blossoms flourish and once more declares His joy: “How beautiful you are, my beloved—how beautiful!” United to him and made partakers of divine nature, let us humble ourselves at the footstool of mercy, offering thanks and firmly embracing this gracious verdict: “How beautiful you are, my beloved—how beautiful!”

One particular grace is highlighted. He says, “Your eyes are doves.” The dove is a gentle bird with soft, tender eyes. There is no fierce glare like the eagle’s—only meekness and purity. Here we observe the humility that Christ sees in his followers. He himself was meek and lowly of heart, and he delights in seeing pride uprooted in us, letting his grace be as an ornament in our hearts.

**1:16, 17. *"Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful. Our couch is green; the beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters are pine."***

To strengthen the believer's hope and deepen their comfort, Christ continues his praise. We should not pass over lightly this tenderness of the Saviour towards us. He reveals the intimacy of our union by showing himself and his people dwelling together in one home. This dwelling is built of the finest and enduring materials and designed as a place of perfect rest. The beams are cedar, the rafters pine, the couch fresh and green. Such closeness belongs only to those who share one household.

These are the delights Christ has provided for his people. If these are ours now, what will the heavenly mansions be like that he is preparing for us? Prepared from the foundation of the world, he now makes ready our eternal home.

## Chapter 2

### **2:1. "I am a rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."**

It is a good discipline to seek Jesus in the pages of Scripture. But we see him also in the fields and in scenes of nature, where he often points us. He once said, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1), but here, by his Spirit, he reveals himself as "the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys."

He chooses one of the noblest flowers and the valley's most humble flowers. Among garden blooms, nothing is more beautiful than the rose. It radiates beauty and has a wonderful smell. Likewise, in the quiet valley, the lily, graceful and with an exquisite smell, delights those who see it. Together, these images present Christ in the fullness of his beauty, grace, and incomparable worth. Yet even these symbols fall short. His excellence surpasses every symbol. His name alone is like perfume poured out.

### **2:2. "As the lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women."**

He has just likened himself to the lily; now he uses the same for his Church, showing us that Christ and his redeemed are one. In Jeremiah, Christ is called "the Lord our righteousness," and that same title is later given to His people (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16).

We are also taught that holiness must be a distinguishing mark of the Christian. The lily blooms amid thorns. Its purity and fragrance stand out against those that wound us. So our lives should be marked by spiritual excellence. In the end, the thorns and briars will be bound for burning (Matthew 13:30).

### **2:3. "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my Beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."**

Should the Church remain silent when Christ commends her? Here, she chooses the apple tree as his image—preeminent in beauty and abundant in fruit. Weary from the journey and scorched by the heat of affliction, she finds rest under the shade of its leaves. There she rests in peace, plucking fruit that hangs within reach, sheltered and refreshed.

So it is with the one who searches fruitlessly for peace in empty forms, lifeless duties, and works. At last, true peace is found in Christ. Here, sheltered in the shade of Christ's righteousness, we cease from work and rest in him. The fiery darts of Satan cannot reach us. In Christ, the soul finds exactly what it needs.

Yet his shelter offers more than peace. This Tree of Life bears eternal fruit (Revelation 2:7). Every hunger is filled, every longing is supplied,

and we are nourished. Blessed indeed are those who sit beneath this gracious Tree.

**2:4. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love."**

A magnificent scene is unfolding here. A royal banquet is prepared, the table spread with abundance. Like the great halls of ancient nobility, banners and emblems wave in the air, proclaiming honour and triumph. Into this banqueting house Christ leads his Church. It is a scene of splendour and generosity, and over her place at the table, there is a banner proclaiming love.

The believer's life is meant to be a continual feast. How different this is from the world! The unbeliever seeks satisfaction in the world of fleeting pleasures. Friendship with the world is hostility to God. It offers no peace to a guilty conscience, no refuge from the curse of the law, no blood to cleanse, no righteousness to cover sin, no key to open heaven, no shelter from coming wrath. Its cup sparkles, but its contents is poison. Those who drink from the world thirst again.

The believer, however, comes to Christ's banquet and proves his word true: "Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). As the believer feasts, his eyes see the banner overhead—love! What a sight! Who can doubt that he loves us, having seen him in the manger, on the cross, and now still interceding?

**2:5-6. "Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me."**

Oh, that such holy feelings were more frequent! They would be, if faith burned with greater warmth. Like the Queen of Sheba before Solomon's glory, the Church feels there is no breath left within her. She cries for sustaining grace, and Christ does not delay. He comes. He lifts her fainting head, supports her weakness, and renews her strength. The promise remains true, "he gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

**2:7. "I adjure you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awake until it pleases."**

There is a solemn warning here. We must take care not to drive Jesus from our hearts. The Scripture offers a gentle pastoral image of gazelles and deer—creatures marked by sensitivity and timidity. We picture them resting beneath the shade, lying beside quiet streams, or moving lightly across open meadows. At the faintest sound, they lift their heads, and the very rustle of a leaf startles them, and they flee for refuge.

This vivid picture becomes a messenger of gospel truth. Christ delights to dwell in the believer's heart; he stands at the door and knocks,

desiring not merely to enter, but to remain (Revelation 3:21).

His love endures from everlasting to everlasting. Yet while his love never changes, the sensible experience of his presence may at times be withdrawn. The place once filled with light may seem empty. Such times are dark and sorrowful, when the soul mourns His absence.

Still, we must not despair. We are sustained by the promise, "For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compcassion on you" (Isaiah 54:7). Mountains may depart and hills be removed, but his covenant of peace shall never be broken (Psalm 42:1). Though he leaves us, it is never final.

Why does the Lord seem to leave us? The fault lies with us. We grieve him, we displease him, and so he withdraws. It is not because he delights to leave, but because our indifference invites the loss.

This warning is not mainly against open and scandalous sin. It warns us against subtle intruders who approach in a pleasing disguise. The world comes quietly, pressing its principles and alluring us with vanities. Unholy pleasures may charm the heart, and the voice of scripture may not be heard. Conscience may grow dull to ungodly sights and sounds, prayer may be neglected, communion with Christ may feel burdensome instead of sweet.

So, in a moment, as the gazelle flees at a sound, Christ may withdraw from his chosen resting place. Let us watch carefully and guard the doors of our hearts. Let no unhallowed thought find entrance. Let us be diligent not to quench the Spirit or resist His gracious rule. If we abide in Christ, we may rest assured that He will abide in us—until we enter that land where separation is no more (John 15:7).

***2:8. "The voice of my Beloved! Behold, He comes, leaping across the mountains--bounding over the hills."***

Here, the church stands attentive to the Lord, captivated in the moment. She proclaims, "It is the voice of my Beloved!" As she looks up, she sees him coming, purposeful and urgent. Though mountains and hills may lie in the way, nothing can hinder the Lord's arrival. Let these reflections deepen our spiritual insight!

The Church recognises the voice of her Lord, and it brings joy (John 10:27). We should pray, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9). This voice echoes throughout the pages of Scripture, rich and with tender promises. The Saviour communicates His love, and the believer eagerly absorbs these truths, exclaiming, "It is the voice of my Beloved!"

No melody can compare to this divine sound. We must remain attentive

and embrace the joy that comes from hearing his word. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David (Isaiah 55:3). As the ear listens, the eyes also see Jesus coming with haste.

Faith recognises that he has come to take on human nature. He comes to face the challenges and obstacles—Satan and his forces will try to block the way—but his zeal for the Father’s glory and his deep love for his people propel Him forward. He leaps over every mountain and over every hill that stands in his way. In the same way, he comes to dwell in our hearts, to renew our spirits, and to fill us with joy. Indifference might attempt to shut the door, and doubt may raise barriers, but these are all in vain, because Jesus "comes, leaping over the mountains—bounding over the hills!"

**2:9. "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there He stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice."**

The presence of Christ may not always seem bright. At times, his presence seems to retreat, and "He hides Himself behind our wall." The reasons for this are clear. Jesus shows us that absence is not his preference, but we tend to indulge in harmful desires, allowing our faith to weaken, becoming less earnest in prayer, and neglecting the blessings found in the ordinances, the means of grace.

However, the times when he hides his face do not indicate that he has abandoned us. As Scripture reminds us, "He hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16), and "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed (Malachi 3:6).

We soon recognise when he re-enters our lives, gazing through the windows of our hearts, revealing himself once again. Jesus shows us that absence is not His preference; his true joy lies in dwelling with his people. Let us always call upon him to rest in his love. We must hold fast to his promise: "Abide in Me, and I in you." Let us heed the truth that "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

**2:10. "My Beloved speaks and says to me: Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away."**

Here, the church states that she has heard Christ’s voice, and who can hear the voice of Christ without joy! He calls her to rise without delay, to come into fellowship with him and be refreshed.

**2:11. "For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone."**

Winter is the season of dreariness. Nature is locked in the cold, the soil is hard with frost, and the trees are lifeless without leaves. Storms are frequent, and the flocks and herds seek sheltered retreats.

But this winter season is not forever. Soon, the sun will shine again with its power to revive. The scene has changed. Gladness comes again, and happiness is felt that "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

**2:12. *"The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land."***

The entire scene is changed. The garden, the fields, the meadows, and the valleys all smile in renewed beauty. In rich abundance, flowers show their lovely blooms with delightful fragrance. Earth seems to bloom again in the loveliness of Eden, and the song of birds is heard throughout the air.

**2:13. *"The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away."***

As another season returns, some trees attract special notice. The fig tree promises a rich harvest. The grape appears in clusters on the branches of the vine, and we hear the call of our beloved, "arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

Let us now turn to what this teaches us, to the believer's heart. There are times when the dark and dreary spiritual winter freezes the inward feeling. Storms afflict, temptations come with fury, and shelter from the attacks of the evil one seems far away. We've all experienced such dark and stormy days!

But the Sun of righteousness sends out his reviving rays! The season of gloom is past, the bouts of temptation are over and gone. Grace revives us again, and the heart smiles like a well-watered garden. The wilderness rejoices and blossoms like the rose. The heart that was so dull and silent now breaks out with songs of praise. The fig tree, no longer barren, is filled with delicious fruit. It is the resurrection time for grace in the soul!

Jesus now invites us to closer fellowship with himself. He calls the soul to arise, to leave its couch of sloth. He calls us to be strong and to break from the chains and to join with the Lord in closer fellowship. If this is the sweetness of his present call while we live on earth, how glorious will it be when his voice calls our bodies to arise from the grave, and come away to his eternal presence, and to enjoy the pleasures which are at His right hand forevermore!

**2:14. *"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."***

How tenderly the Lord addresses us in these words and gives us the most endearing name, "My dove." The dove is special; its form, its song,

its habits, its faithfulness. In every respect, it is a lovely bird, and so also, the church is lovely in the eyes of our Redeemer.

This is a weighty truth; it requires faith to recognise that the eyes of Christ can rest on us in satisfaction. If we are conscious at all of our deep corruption, of our inconsistency and waywardness, how much more must the omniscience of Christ be able to see of our deformity. But in his grace, he views us robed in his own righteousness and adorned with the excellencies which his Holy Spirit gives us. Christ sees us and says, "O my dove."

The dove, also, is distinguished for its gentleness. This grace was pre-eminent in Christ, and we are exhorted to follow these footsteps. Proud and arrogant looks are to be shunned, and in lowliness of mind each of us is to esteem others as better than himself (Philippians 2:3). So, we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14).

The dove is known for its fidelity, for forming strong bonds, and often mates for life. Here again, we see the image of the believer espoused as a chaste virgin to the Lord. The whole heart is given, and every affection clings to her beloved.

He asks to hear our voice. Let us humbly obey, calling out to his throne with constant petitions. By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let all our requests be made known to Him, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).

Let our praise be heard also. He will listen to our voice, for he says, "sweet is your voice, and your face is lovely."

***2:15. "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."***

There is a solemn lesson here telling us that grace is a tender plant. It needs to be guarded with care. Believers are represented as a vineyard of rich and abundant fruit. But it is infested with crafty and dangerous foes who watch to inflict harm on us. The grace in our lives is constantly endangered and under attack.

The picture shows us the subtleties of sin that will spoil the Spirit's work. First, there is our original sin and corruption. When sin entered, every imagination of the thoughts became evil, continually (Genesis 6:5). A poisonous fountain was opened, briars and thorns sprang up, and these corruptions are like foxes in the vineyard. Let us be wise, and be on our guard. Corruption, undetected and unopposed, will kill the work of grace in the life of a believer and soon render the soul a barren wilderness.

Second, Satan continually plots to destroy the work of divine grace in the soul. He is called that old serpent (Revelation 12:9), but is he not, also, a crafty fox? How stealthily he crept into the garden of Eden, and with how deceitfully he enticed our first parents! He tempted and prevailed with a lie, and with lies he still continues to succeed against us. We know that if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us. We know, also, that if our strength is weak against this enemy, we may call on Jesus. Satan may be strong, but Jesus is stronger. Satan may have power, but Jesus has omnipotence. The victory will be ours. We shall tread Satan under our feet shortly (Romans 16:20).

Third, the temptations of the world. The world calls us to its attractions, but it is a dangerous path. It leads from God and goes straight down to hell. It presents a cup of a refreshing drink that is sweet for a moment, but deadly poison. The world hinders the buds of grace in the soul, bringing weariness and disappointments.

Fourth, in this evil world, there are also false teachers. They do not always show their true colours, transforming themselves into angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). They are murderers in disguise; they destroy the growth of grace, leading to ignorance and death — to accept their teaching is to abandon Christ.

The offspring of the old fox are many. Let us be on our guard against the brood of the devil. They appear innocent, and the danger may not be obvious, but they are deadly. Let us not spare the little foxes, for they will destroy us.

**2:16. "My Beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies."**

Here, the heart of the believer overflows with love. She realises that she has gotten a treasure, the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:46). The gracious invitations have subdued her, and she flies directly to her Lord on the wings of joy. She confirms, "My beloved is mine." To have Christ is to have all that heaven can give. It is to possess his blood to wash away every sin, his death to redeem from all iniquity, his sufferings to cancel the curse of the law, his robe of obedience to clothe us for the wedding feast, his throne of glory to be a seat forever, his intercession to keep the evil one from us and to enrich us with blessings, his providences to direct us, his angels to encamp around us with their protecting wings, and his Holy Spirit to teach, to sanctify, to comfort. It is a happy soul that can say, "My Beloved is mine."

She affirms something else, for there is reciprocity in the gospel. She says, "I am his." The believer is Christ's, first, by sovereign creation. The Word breathed into him the breath of life, and he shall never die. The thing formed is the property of him that formed it.

Secondly, we are Christ's by right of conquest. By natural birth, the

believer is born a prisoner in the cells of Satan. Christ, who is stronger than the strong man armed, attacks that prison-house, demolishes the empire of the powers of darkness, breaks all chains from the enfettered hands, and calls the prisoners out.

Third, we are Christ's by purchase. We are deep in debt to Christ. Great was the price required to liberate us from the demands of the law, but Christ did, by his blood. The balances of justice are more than corrected by his blood. Every debt is paid, and we are Christ's by superabundant purchase.

Fourth, we are his by voluntary surrender. Other lords have had dominion over us, but we have rejected them. We have come out like Israel from Egypt's bondage, to present ourselves, mind and body, and every moment of our time to Him, the Lord of lords. So in every sense the believer exclaims, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

What a wonderful and unsearchable truth that Christ finds refreshment among His people—"he feeds among the lilies." The Church has been portrayed as the "lily among thorns," but he loves to dwell among his people, in communion with the flowers, which he has planted, and his grace has matured. What gracious condescension, and it requires faith to grasp, that his delights are with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:31).

***2:17. "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my Beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains."***

We must confess that earthly days are not without their gloom. The shadows of night are frequently cast over our days. How zealously we seek the presence of Christ at these times! We cry, "Turn, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the mountains of Bether." Turn and come near to me! Come quickly like the gazelle skipping on the mountains. Bless us, visit us until the brightness of the heavenly day comes again, and the clouds and darkness are all gone. Then we will see him face to face, and bask in the sunshine of his smile!

## Chapter 3

### **3:1. "On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not."**

Here the church lies in distress. It is a season of darkness and despondency. She seeks her Beloved, but the search is fruitless. The time of this scene is night. Life is not one uninterrupted day of sunshine. The rays of the sun are often shaded with gloom, and night recurs. So, also, Jesus does not always seem present. For a while, the light of His countenance may be withdrawn.

There are various reasons for this. Unbelief comes in and hides Christ's face from the soul. But this night has not forever blotted out the day. That cannot happen to the believer. In the darkest night, the sun is not further away, but hidden from view. The love of Christ never ceases to be. Communion may be interrupted, but union is eternal.

When the believer seems deserted, she still shows signs of life, and in her night, she seeks him whom her soul loves. She professes that she is searching for him whom her soul loves. Where love is once implanted by the Spirit, it may languish and flicker like a feeble flame. But the power that first caused that love will never die. Its liveliness may wither, but its life endures. In the darkest night of desertion, the believer will seek Him whom his soul still loves.

She says that she sought him on her bed. She is lying lazily, unwilling to get up. She does not put any energy into the search. She does not gird up the loins of her mind. It is no surprise that the search was ineffectual—"I sought Him, but I found Him not."

If we are to regain the presence of the Lord, we must break from ease and laziness. We must not be slothful, but followers. "We ask and do not receive, because we ask wrongly" (James 4:3). The Lord, though seemingly absent, is not really departed, for "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

### **3:2. "I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not."**

The Christian continues in distress. She is disconsolate. Her Lord is absent, and her joy is gone. In vain she seeks him on a bed of laziness. She resolves to exert her energies and to make an effort—"I will rise now." It is wise to take a break from laziness, but efforts will not prosper unless they are in the right direction and with determination. Many good resolutions have brought no lasting fruit. Early blossoms may show lovely flowers, but frost may wither them. Many have resolved to leave the paths of sin and to walk in the narrow way, but

Satan came, the world enticed, the flesh seduced, hopes were frustrated, and the end was misery.

Lot's wife resolved to flee to Zoar. She paused, took a look back, and went no further. Here, the Christian resolves, "I will rise now." We find her in the night, but she goes out, through the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways seeking him whom her soul loved. Love urged her on in her efforts, but efforts may err if they are in the wrong direction. He had not promised to be in public or crowded places. It is no surprise, then, that she repeats with disappointment, "I sought Him, but I found Him not."

Let us be wise. Let faith enquire as it did at the first, "Tell me where you feed." We are not left without direction. We are told that Christ is a treasure hidden in the field of God's Word. "Search the Scriptures; for you think that in them you have eternal life- and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). As the sun is full of light and the ocean full of water, so the Bible is full of Christ. It testifies to the glories of his person and his completed work. It records his grace, his tenderness, and his love. It invites us, it gives us promises, and on every page it seems to say, 'Behold Me! Behold Me!' Those who dig in this quarry will never dig in vain.

He has also promised to meet us in the ordinances. There he will show them his hands and his side. In the communion of his saints, he manifests himself. He joined the two disciples as they talked of him on their journey towards Emmaus. They returned to testify how he made himself known to them.

**3:3, 4. *"The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me."***

Here, the believer is still wandering in the streets. She cannot find her Lord, and she cannot rest. The guards of the city meet her on their nightly rounds. She calls them. She does not give the name of her beloved, but enquires whether they have seen him. Too impatient to wait for a reply, she hurries on, and to her surprise, she discovers him. She clings to him and refuses to let him go from her embrace. She leads him to some quiet retreat, where, without interruption, she may talk with Him.

The believer who laments the absence of the Lord will not cease to search for him. 'Where may I find him?' is the thought that occupies her heart. She will seek advice from those who cross her path, describing him only as the one occupying the centre of her heart. So, like Mary in the garden, enquires, "If you have carried him away, tell me where you

have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (John 20:15).

In times of difficulty, it is good to seek direction from spiritual friends and godly ministers. They may be able to help, and their wise counsel may relieve a burden. Sorrows that are locked up may prove too much, but if they have vent, we will find relief. The believer may profit from godly advice, but it is no substitute for him whom the soul thus loves.

Having found him, the believer gazes with renewed joy and enfolds her Beloved in his warm embrace. She clings to him and cannot relax her embrace. We see this in Jacob's wrestling (Genesis 32:24). The Lord desired release, but Jacob says, "I will not consent. I will not let you go." It is possible for the believer, who is feeble flesh and blood, to overpower the Lord, who is omnipotent! Yes, faith is strengthened until omnipotence succumbs. He who kindled the flame keeps it burning with the oil of grace.

**3:5. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."**

Here, the believer enjoys such sweet fellowship and dreads being interrupted, in case the Lord leaves her again. How blessed it will be when sin will no longer enter, and Jesus will no longer be absent!

**3:6. "What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?"**

The teachings of the Spirit are incredibly diverse. The beauty of nature, the intricacies of art, the wonders of science, and the rich tapestry of history all find their way into sacred texts to present a picture of Jesus. Here, we see a vivid array of imagery. From her vantage point, the believer surveys the landscape before her, gazing across the wilderness, she sees columns of smoke, fragrant and infused with precious scents. She exclaims, "Who is this?"

This question is found often in Scripture. We hear, "Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (Isaiah 63:1). Crowds in Jerusalem are moved by the approach of One to whom homage is given. The reply, "This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." (See also 1 Samuel 17:26) "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" Job 38:2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Psalm 24:8 "Who is this King of glory?"

Here, the believer sees an object that is new to her admiration. But can this be Christ coming up out of the wilderness? Is he not God's co-eternal and co-equal Son? Isn't his home in the heaven of heavens? Yes, but love beyond all our powers of thought, for he emptied himself of his

glory, and descended to this fallen world. He entered into a wilderness state, assumed the rags of poor humanity, that he may endure our curse, sustain our penalties, pay all our debt, shed blood to wash away our sin, and work out a righteousness to cover the iniquities of his people.

Though he was so great, he became low; though he was so mighty, he put on feebleness; though he was rich, he was clothed in poverty; though he was the Lord of heaven, he appeared on earth as a lowly child. He treads this wilderness, having no place in which to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). We see, then, the appropriate picture which shows him in a wilderness state.

But he advances as a pillar of smoke. Our thoughts are turned to the tabernacle in the wilderness, where a pillar of smoke rested by day. Clouds of smoke ascended from the altar of burnt-offering--and from the golden altar of incense. These pillars of smoke are perfumed. Thus, to gaze on Christ refreshes, revives, cheers, exhilarates, and makes us happy. Myrrh and frankincense, and the costly spices of merchants, are employed to show the sweet delights which faith receives from Him.

**3:7, 8. "Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night."**

The picture we have here is taken from the palace of an Eastern Monarch. Solomon's couch is there in view. It is strictly guarded round about by courageous men, selected from the chief warriors. They are watchful in case of a sudden attack and expert with weapons. Here we see the church is securely protected.

This monarch is a type of Christ. His couch represents a place of quiet rest, and in this, we see the church as the resting place of Jesus. It is written, "he quiet you by his love" (Zephaniah 3:17), and we hear him call, "abide in Me, and I in you" (John 15:4).

The couch, surrounded by such warriors, is the Church, guarded against attack. In this wilderness of woe, God's people are exposed to many dangers. They are as the little lamb surrounded by a pack of wolves, as the dove pursued by preying hawks, as a tender plant exposed to wintry blasts, as a vessel tossed on the waves of the sea, and threatened by treacherous rocks. But the Church lives on, even in the midst of her perils. No foe prevails, and no danger can destroy her.

How can this be? It is not because of her own strength. The church survives and will safely reach her eternal home, because her Lord holds his shield around her. This is what the Lord said of his vineyard, "I, the Lord, am its keeper; Every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I

keep it day and night." (Isaiah 27:3). We hear the sustaining voice "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore." (Psalm 121:5-8).

The Lord's people are kept by the power of God through faith unto eternal life (1 Peter 1:5). Their life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). His sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of His hand. The Father, who gave them Him, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of His Father's hand (John 10:28-29). Jesus gives his angels charge over his people; "the angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7).

Our strongest foes are invisible, so also are our strongest friends. Remember Elisha, who prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant so that he could see that the surrounding hills were filled with chariots of fire and horses of fire (2 Kings 6:17). If we have eyes to see, we should see a multitude of good angels driving back the legion of the prince of darkness, and keeping us safe. The armies of heaven, like Israel's valiant men, protect us from all sudden attacks. We are kept unto eternal life by Him who never slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4).

**3:9, 10. "King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem."**

Here, the king plans and constructs a chariot for his bridal procession. It reflects the treasures of his empire, in skill and resources. Lebanon contributes its best cedar trees, and the mines supply their wealth of jewels. The pillars are made of silver, the bottom is gold, and the seat is made of purple material.

In this, there is a clear picture of the Gospel and the provisions of grace. The gospel is provided by the choicest possessions of heaven. The pavement for the feet catches our attention first; it is the love of God.

The Father loves and designs a plan to rescue his people from their misery and bring them to his heavenly home. Jesus loves and accepts them, as his bride, his jewels, the sheep of his pasture, the delight of his heart. He comes to save, rising above every barrier and defeating every enemy. He bursts into the prison that confines them, pays all their debts, and prepares clothes fit for his bride. In love, he woos them, takes possession of their hearts, and does not rest until he presents them pure and blameless in the presence of his Father.

The Holy Spirit loves. He condescends to seek them, and by his sanctifying power, he cleanses them from inward filth. He opens their eyes that they may see Christ's finished work. He unlocks their ears so that they may listen to his voice. He wins their hearts, that Jesus may be welcomed to occupy the throne of their hearts.

Every part of the Gospel-plan shows that all the riches of heaven were employed in its execution. The gospel plan is an exhibition of infinite wisdom. All the intelligence of angels and of men, all the resources of human intellect could never have designed a plan in which God and his every attribute should be infinitely glorified, and man eternally redeemed.

God's wisdom designed this glorious plan of salvation, and what his wisdom designed, his power executed. The pillars of the chariot are of the choicest metal, beautiful and durable. So God's power brings the plan together and gathers his people. Every loved one is rescued from the enemy, and not one is lost (John 17:12). Divine power makes them more than conquerors.

His providences, also, are employed to secure heaven for his children. Their path is often difficult and seems to threaten destruction. But he is working all things together for good, to give them safety and deliverance (Romans 8:28-30). Happy are those who have been seated in this chariot, by the grace of God! How can they praise sufficiently!

**3:11. "Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart."**

King Solomon steps out here, arrayed in wedding garments. It is the day of his wedding, and his mother places the marriage crown on his head. Joy and gladness are in the air; festivity pervades the whole scene.

Contemplate this happiness. It is the happiness of a greater person than Solomon, the Bridegroom of his church. It is said of him, "On his head are many diadems" (Revelation 19:12). Let us just consider some of them.

There is the crown of essential Deity. He and the Father sit on one throne of Godhead. He is God over all, blessed forevermore (Romans 9:5).

There is the crown of the mediatorial kingdom given to him by the Father. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion" As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill (Psalm 2:6). In the book of Revelation, he rides out receiving all honour as the King of kings, and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16).

There is the crown of the warrior in triumph. Jesus ascends with clothing dyed in blood from slaughtered foes, and receives his merited reward.

But the crown, which takes our attention here, is the crown of marital union. He condescended to wear the garment of the Bridegroom. The name of the bride is given to the church. We read, "he who has the bride is the Bridegroom!" (John 3:29). And again, "The Spirit and the Bride say come" (Revelation 22:17). It is a blessed assurance, "As the Bridegroom rejoices over the Bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5), and the promise, "I will betroth you to me forever" (Hosea 2:19). And again, "In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my Baal' (Hosea 2:16).

This is the glory of the Gospel. He takes poor sinners and makes them the objects of his tenderest love. Yes, he comes to earth and becomes one of our family, that he might share our nature, and by this he is qualified to be our Bridegroom. He strives to win our love by every endearing effort. He knocks at the door of our hearts and calls us to open it to Him. He cries, "Look unto Me." "Come unto Me." "Abide in Me." "See how I have loved you; behold my wounded hands and my pierced side." He sends his Holy Spirit to remove any reluctance and to win our hearts. Then the union is complete, the Bride clasps him to her heart, it is the day of his marriage, and he receives the wedding crown.

This union has not yet reached its perfect joy. Yet a little while, and the glorious shout will be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him." "Let us rejoice and exult, and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7). Then the joy will be consummated; it will be a day of the rejoicing of his heart.

## Chapter 4

**4:1. "Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead."**

Here are Christ's words of admiration to his beloved church. He gives her the name, which shows that she has a place in his heart. She is his beloved. Then he expresses his delight in her beauty through a variety of images that commend her beauty. First, a general and repeated term, "how beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!" Then he lists her attractions in seven distinct instances.

It is amazing that the church should appear so lovely in Christ's eyes. We read it, we believe it, and we adore him.

In these pictures, natural beauty helps us, and its significance nourishes our faith to see. Conscience tells us how dark and deformed we are by nature, as descendants of our fallen parents. Corruption is incessantly manifested in our thoughts, our words, and our works. When we look at our daily life, we sink into shame and confusion. We blush to lift our eyes to the all-holy One. We feel that we should be rejected and abhorred. But we hear Jesus say, "How beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!"

This estimation is the result of grace. Jesus, in mercy, comes down to earth and walks in our nature before God in perfect obedience to the law. He has woven a lovely robe, in which each member of the Church is clothed, and this acknowledgement is well deserved, "how beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!"

By His Spirit, also, he works within us, and sows the seeds of grace that spring up, blossom, and bear fruit. So he says of her, "You have doves' eyes behind your locks." No bird is more lovely than the dove. It is a symbol of humility and purity, and so sets before us a beautiful picture of the believer's character. But the chief beauty of the dove is the gentleness of its eye. There is no pride, no haughtiness, and no fierceness.

He also mentions the hair. The goats of Gilead have a beautifully long hide, the flowing locks, like the distinguishing mark of Nazarites, which show the believer is consecrated to their God.

**4:2. "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young."**

Teeth are especially visible. Their beauty is in their regularity and their pure colour. They find similitude in the shorn flock, white from the

washing stream, and accompanied by sporting lambs. But these teeth are more than ornamental; they remind us to feed on the Word.

**4:3. "Your lips are like a scarlet threat, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil."**

A scarlet ribbon is the next mentioned, as an emblem of the lips. The believer's mouth is lovely, as it speaks prayer and praise. The cheeks, also like pomegranate, are a beautiful colour, speaking to us of radiant boldness.

**4, 5. "Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies."**

The king now moves to describe the grace of the form of his beloved. The tall, noble neck is like a lofty tower of David. The body's symmetry is mirrored by twin gazelles feeding among the lilies. Nature furnishes her with beauty that symbolises the Church as Christ views it.

**4:6. "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hills of frankincense."**

We cannot praise God enough for his holy Word! We never get tired of telling of Christ's loving heart towards his flock. In this passage, God's people are set before us as a mountain of myrrh, and a hill of frankincense, and he delights in them and loves to come to them.

Mountains and hills are great features in the landscape of nature. They are a safe place in times of danger, and in this regard, they symbolise the Church. We read, "It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills" (Isaiah 2:2).

Believers are referred to as a city set upon a hill (Matthew 5:14). As you cannot conceal something that is set on a hill, so believers are called to be conspicuous in the world. Their holy walk should shine brightly, and everyone should take note that they spend time with Jesus, that their citizenship is in heaven, that their pursuits are not of this world, and that they live by faith, above earthly pleasures.

The mountain and the hill are also a place of beautiful fragrance, of myrrh and frankincense. It grows there and satisfies the senses, which teaches us that Christ finds comfort and delight in His people. In this fragrance, we see that these spices represent prayer and praise, and it is joy and gladness to the Lord when believers pour out the incense of their hearts in prayer and praise. He delights to listen to their supplicating voices and bows his ear to their needs.

Their praises, also, are as fragrant as the myrrh, and as satisfying as the

smell of frankincense. It is a mystery how our offerings are so satisfying to the Saviour, but faith grasps the truth.

Should we be silent, then, either in prayer or praise? As we draw near to Christ, we have his promise that he will draw near to us and come to dwell within us (James 4:8). At present, his presence is but a shadow of the brightness of the glory that will be revealed. But in the light of heaven, these are days of mists, gloom, and darkness. Now, we see in part, we know in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). Unbelief hinders us and prevents an open and clear sight; sins rise as a cloud to obscure and cast a shadow over the beauties and the smiles of Christ.

But soon the day will break, and the shadows will flee away! Soon, the Sun of Righteousness will arise (Malachi 4:2). Soon, we will see him as he is, face to face, in the brightness of his person (1 John 3:2).

**4:7. "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you."**

The Word of God is filled with great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4). These promises spring from the heart of Christ to cheer, to lift up, to gladden, and to sanctify us. May we have faith to take hold of them and not waver. These promises are sweet as we meditate on them; they are the seeds of holiness and peace, the very gate of heaven.

The particular beauties of the Church that Christ has mentioned previously (vss. 1-6) are summarised in these words: "you are all beautiful, my love; there is no spot in you." Christ sees the church as entirely wrapped up in himself. She is beautiful only in his beauty, and lovely only in his loveliness. "He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

There is no spot in the Church, because the blood of Jesus has entirely removed it. Omniscience (all-knowing) may look for sins, but none can be found. She has no defect because she is clothed in his perfect righteousness. She appears righteous, even as God is righteous.

We must hold fast to this blessed truth without denying the knowledge of our own constant transgressions. In ourselves we are sinful, deformed and loathsome; "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). The most saintly of saints will always pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

**4:8. "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards."**

Here, the Saviour gives an earnest invitation. It seems she pauses and lingers on the bleak, barren peaks that separate them. In the recesses of these cliffs, there were ravenous beasts. In this call, then, Christ

summons us to separate from the world.

This place, separated from the Saviour, is infested by savage beasts that torture the prey. The symbol is dark, and there is a clear warning here. This is the cold world, and it looks on the needs of others with chilling indifference. It has no heart to sympathise. It extends no hand to help. It does not care about the suffering of the poor and needy.

There is no pleasure in this place, no sweet-smelling flowers, no fruits to refresh. There are only briars and thorns. We look in vain, in this world, for pleasure and peace, and so Christ calls his people to come apart and to unite with him.

This world is a place of danger, cruelty, and craftiness. Here we see the lion tearing the prey, and the panther crouching to spring on it. Here, children of this world, cruelly ruin souls, and subtlety lie in wait to ensnare.

Christ calls us to come away from such destructive fellowships. Let us hear his gracious voice, "Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your homeland far away father's house, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him" (Psalm 45:10-11).

**4:9. "You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace."**

Here, the beauty of the Christian attracts the admiring gaze of Christ; the charms in the Church which rivet the heart of Jesus. He speaks of the influence of the power which wins his loving attention, and we again experience the wonders of his grace. The beauty, which he speaks of, is his own work. It is his gift to the graceless sinner. He gifts the church with beauty, and then expresses satisfaction in her beauty. He loves what his own love has produced. He is captivated by what his bounty has gifted, and that flows in the stream of his grace.

See also, the endearing titles he gives to the Church, "my sister, my spouse." By condescending grace, he has become one of our family. The brother and sister are members of the same family. The bride and the bridegroom are one flesh. Jesus becomes flesh and blood so that he might have the closest relationship with us.

In these names, we are taught that Jesus will advocate our cause, protect us from the enemy, deliver us from evil, elevate us in position, enrich us with gifts, and bless us with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).

**4:10, 11. "How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much**

***better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon."***

The love of Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit, kindles reciprocal love in the believer's heart; "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This love is a strong love; it manifests itself in praise and, in effect, glorifies the Lord.

The Lord sees these and delights in them; "how delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!" It refreshes his heart. He compliments it as more cheerful, invigorating, and strengthening than wine. As the weary man takes wine and is refreshed in his strength, so Jesus marks this love in his people, is refreshed—no earthly refreshments come close to it.

He delights, also, in listening to the utterances of the believer's lips. No prayer, no song of praise, no commendation of his grace and work, fails to touch his heart. Is honey sweet to the taste? Is milk nourishing? These are symbols of the delight he takes in hearing the utterance of his people.

He adds also, "the fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice! The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon." The holy walk and the conversation of the believer is as the sweetest fragrance. What the Lord complements in us, he is willing and able to accomplish.

***4:12. "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed."***

Here, nature is employed to illustrate the beauties of the sister and the bride. It is used to help us to see her excellencies—the garden, the fountain, and the springs of water.

A garden is a sweet spot. It is enclosed from the wilderness of the world. It is cultivated with care, weeds and briars are removed, and the soil is enriched. Flowers with all sorts of brilliance, colour, and fragrance are planted, and the best fruits are found there.

A garden is for refreshment. The owner finds a quiet place, a retreat for meditation. In his innocence, Adam was placed in a garden by the heavenly Father, who designed it for him as a restful residence. The garden ranks high in nature's chosen spots, but for it to be fruitful, it requires it to be well watered. So, the fountain is an important feature in the garden, and fruitfulness is assured.

A garden is also carefully fenced. It is separated from surrounding waste and from dangerous, destructive beasts. They may prowl around, but they cannot reach the bounty.

The fountain and the spring are well guarded. In eastern climates where the sun is hot and water is scarce, the treasures of the garden are carefully guarded! As the vineyard carefully planted and preserved has been selected as the symbol of the Church, so here the beautiful garden and its refreshing springs repeat the lesson. The people of God are chosen out of the waste howling wilderness (Deuteronomy 32:10), separated from the barren world, and selected to show the glories of the Lord. In the believer, the Spirit sows the seeds of fragrant and rich graces and nurtures the growth of holiness.

How carefully, also, are believers preserved, for the garden is locked up. Many enemies hate the child of God and wish to lay them waste, but their rage and enmity are powerless because the believer is kept by the power of God through faith unto eternal life (1 Peter 1:5). Jesus, their Lord, is watchful and will defend. As the mountains stand round about Jerusalem, so His watchful eye and His almighty arm bestow security (Psalm 125:2).

God has arranged the providences of life to minister to his people, and a host of angels are employed to spread their protecting wings around us (Psalm 34:7).

Think also of the fountain and the spring, for they invigorate and refresh us. Without them, the soil would be dry and barren. Remove believers from the earth, and you remove fertility and loveliness from the world. If they were not present, the earth would be a wilderness with only noxious thorns. As the fountain and the spring refresh, so the words and works of the believer are a blessing on this earth!

**4:13, 14. "Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices - "**

In this verse, our attention is still fixed on the fertility of the garden. It is bound in all plants and shrubs which delight the eye and gratify the senses. There are many of them, and they are all fragrant. This takes us back to the Garden of Eden, in which God made every plant pleasant to the eye and good for food.

This garden is chosen to represent the Church, in which every tree and shrub is planted by the heavenly Father's hand. There are many counterfeits in the world, but they will be discovered and rooted up on the last day. This is a solemn warning: "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away" (John 15:2).

But every plant in this garden is a branch broken from a wild olive tree and grafted into the good olive tree, partaking of the riches of the heavenly root (Romans 11:17). They are chosen out of the wild desert of

the world, renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and bear the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God.

Notice the fragrance that flows from these plants, and the delicious fruits. These are the graces which the Holy Spirit produces in the believer. First, there is the eye of faith which sees Christ Jesus, the ear which hears his inviting call, the feet which run after him, the hand that takes hold of him.

Second, in this garden, the grace of hope also blooms. It looks forward to spring, to the coming glory of the heavenly inheritance, and expects the rich perfume of heaven. Third, love blossoms there also, the counterpart of the peaceful "plant of renown" (Ezekiel 34:29).

Around these graceful plants of faith, hope, love, and peace, there are many shrubs. There is meekness with its lowly head, the fragrance of humility, and patience which endures without withering in the blasts of adversity that threaten its destruction. There is joy also, and peace that brings refreshing.

***4:15. "a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon."***

The scene before us has concentrated on the collected treasures of beauty and perfume. The Church is also described as "a garden fountain, a well of living water, as refreshing as the streams from the Lebanon mountains." We know that Lebanon supplied the tributaries that irrigated the chosen land, and we learn that the church brings refreshing waters to a fallen world. In the words of Jesus, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit." (John 7:37-39).

***4:16. "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits."***

There are times when the garden is dreary, cold, and dull. The flowers droop, and the fragrance of the flowers ceases to perfume the air. The invigorating breezes have withheld their influence. The sigh is then heard, Oh! that the north wind would awake, and the south wind breathe again!

The same is true of the believer's heart. Grace seems to flow slowly, the work of the Holy Spirit seems to be sporadic, and faith is not exercised as lively as it once was. Hope also does not look out as gladly as it did, and love does not exert its influence. In these times, the believer should exert his energies and wrestle in prayer. He should call for the Holy Spirit to return in his reviving and life-giving power.

The wind is a fitting symbol of the Holy Spirit. It blows where it wills, and

you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, or where it goes, so is every one that is born of the Spirit (John 3:8). We know when the Spirit is working, and we know also, by our deadness, when he is absent.

Sometimes he returns in chilling dispensations like a blast of the north wind, to restore life and strength. Tribulation works patience, and patience opens the door that other graces may enter (James 1:3-4). Before we are afflicted, our feet wandered from God's ways, but affliction calls us again to the upward path and gives us power to climb with vigour.

Painful discipline prunes the spreading vine and causes the branches to produce more abundant fruit. So, also, when mercy smiles, and prosperity diffuses joy, then gratitude swells in the heart — fresh discoveries of God's love cheer, and praise redoubles its adoring songs. Thus, refreshing breezes from the south bring new life and fragrance, and we are taught that the varied operations of the Holy Spirit, both bitter and sweet, invigorate the heart and give new life to grace.

It is in times of refreshing like this that we cry, "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat his pleasant fruits," and it is a wonder that anything in us should give God joy. But the Saviour does take pleasure when our hearts are faithful, and so we should strive to cultivate the grace of the gospel in our lives. He did not think it too much to empty himself for us. He endured the cross and despised the shame, for the joy set before him in our redemption. Should we be dull and indifferent then, and not cultivate our hearts as the garden of pleasant fruits for his refreshment?

As each morning dawns, let our thoughts be set to serve the Lord and glorify his name! As the day proceeds, let the same earnest feeling be dominant in us! When our lips open, let our words be fragrant with grace. When our feet move, let every step be in the path marked out by his Holy Spirit. At home or abroad, let us thoroughly live for Christ. And in the evenings, let our hearts bless him for mercies bestowed, and let us cleanse the hours which have passed, by sprinkling them all with his atoning blood! Thus may we always present ourselves as full ripe fruits in the garden of his grace, and show that in response to our earnest prayer, the north wind and the south have breathed on us graciously.

## Chapter 5

**5:1. "I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk. Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!"**

The Church has scarcely uttered her invitation to come (4:16) when it is accepted with "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse." Heaven smiles and sends out the assurances that prayer is accepted. Our prayers fly directly to the mercy-seat and triumphantly prevail. It is the breath of the Holy Spirit, and it cannot fail, for it touches the heart of love and moves the right hand of omnipotence.

Let this scene dispel all doubts and fears. Let it excite more earnestness in the exercise of prayer, for it cannot be overestimated. The believer feels that he may present all of his needs, for the supplies of grace will respond with ample supply. The answer may not exactly comply with our enlightened desires, but it will be answered in accordance with divine wisdom.

Our Lord invites our persistence in prayer, so why do we hold back? Let us celebrate the assurance he gives, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). The angel was commanded to fly swiftly to Daniel as he prayed, and it is recorded that we might follow his example and partake of the success.

Let us view Jesus hastening into his garden, for he assures us that he is not indifferent to the graces which he himself has planted. He looked for the fragrance of grace, and fragrance fills the air, and he is gratified by the produce of our poor hearts! He looked for the sweet fragrance of grace, and he found more. He testified that there is food most delicious and abundant, to increase strength and invigorating power. "I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk." It requires a strong and deep faith to realise that Christ can find any charms in the believing heart.

He does not rejoice in what springs from our poor nature, but in what his love has cultivated. Let us learn, also, that he gives more grace (James 4:6). We should not sit down content, but with his help we should climb high in the heavenward path, for there are summits above summits yet to be reached. We may have drawn water from the wells of salvation, but there are depths below depths of surpassing excellence, which our lines have not yet fathomed. We may have gathered fruit from branches hanging low, but there is fruit to be reached on the top branches. Let us not rest until we are filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). Let us cultivate our gardens with faith, with diligence, and with prayer, that they may contain what our Lord seeks to find.

We invite him, and he in turn invites us. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). The banquet which his grace provides is rich, described as "a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined" (Isaiah 25:6). There is a rich abundance of the Holy Word, of refreshing promises in the Bread of Life, and all the discoveries of redeeming love. Who will refuse the invitation, "Eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved."

**5:2. "I slept, but my heart was awake."**

These words express the state the church so often finds itself in, and here we see the tension between the flesh and the spirit (Galatians 5:17). The 'old man' does not obey the dictates of grace, but grace is there, immortal and divine, and grace lives in spite of opposition.

It is sad when this sleep prevails in the believer, when the eyes are closed in spiritual sleepiness. Desire for good declines like a faded flower. Faith is weak and does not go out in power and grasp the Saviour's finished work. Hope does not open the eyes, nor sees the prospect of the glorious kingdom, and love no longer sings the songs of heaven. These graces, so precious when they are active, become dull and depressed and lifeless. Spiritual indifference brings depression where life once shone brightly.

The Scripture, although precious, is no longer loved and studied, but read with indifference. We no longer can trace the beauties of redeeming love in every word, in every line, and we no longer see the glories of God's saving work shine in the pages of holy Scripture. We may continue to read, but it is a wearying task. Grace is sleeping, and the Word of God is obscured.

Our energies and efforts to speak of and spread the knowledge of Christ's name also languish. Joy becomes joyless, the song of praise has no melody.

But what is the cause of this? It comes from the lack of prayer and listening to the vile temptations of a deceitful world. We cease to watch. We cease to pray. We listen to the tempter's voice. We do not come apart from the seductive company of the world. Can we be surprised that we lose spiritual vitality? Let us be wise and resist every temptation. Let our prayer cease not, "Give me life according to your Word" (Psalm 119:25).

But grace, though it is obscured, is not extinguished. The eclipse hides, but does not destroy the rays of grace. We are "born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding

Word of God, which remains forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Liveliness may have declined, but life still remains. The flame may not shine, but there is still oil in the lamp. The seed, though deeply buried, retains the germ of life. Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3), and "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:35-39). If Satan could prevail, the work of Christ would come to an end. But this can never be, his sheep shall never perish, and none shall ever pluck them out of his hand (John 10:28-29) — "I sleep, but my heart wakes."

The flesh may lust against the Spirit, but the Spirit raises the standard against it. The strong man armed may be destructive, but the Stronger—the omnipotent—will triumph. We may be desponding, but we may not despair. We may be cast down, but we shall not be destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). We may sleep, but the heavenly principle still lives. It is unextinguishable, for "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6), and "we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls" (Hebrews 10:39).

**5:2. "A sound! My beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."**

This is a tender picture of the Saviour's love. We see the church drowsy, apathetic, indifferent, and yielding to the seductions of spiritual sleepiness.

In contrast, the Lord comes determined, knocking with perseverance, addressing her in warm affection, showing that her coldness cannot kill his zeal. He prays for admission; he asks her to see the hardship of his exposure. The lessons here should stir our affection and open our hearts to welcome the loving Saviour! It is a stubborn heart that can resist such persevering love.

Here again, we see that when the believer yields to the world's overpowering seductions, there is still spiritual vitality in him. He is lethargic, but his ears are open. He does not care to reply, yet he still hears. He will not stir up his spirit, but he cannot be completely deaf. Even the drowsy heart can recognise the Beloved's voice. The feelings may be distant, but he can acknowledge that the Beloved is near, and recognise that he is calling for admission — "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocks."

We may deplore this miserable state, and it is encouraging to see that grace still lives and is aware of the Lord's nearness. The voice is the voice that she had often listened to when she was rejoicing in the

nearness to her Beloved, and she is impressed with the truth that having loved his own which were in the world, he loves them unto the end (John 13:1). The lesson is repeated, that our indifference does not bring a fatal blow to His everlasting love. He still owns her as one united to him by the strongest and tenderest ties. He has assumed her nature; he is her elder brother; he owns her as his family's offspring; and he professes that his love is as strong as ever. It was born in the everlasting day, and time cannot destroy it or write its epitaph. He still delights in her, and in his zeal to awaken her, he adds, "my undefiled."

As the church appears lukewarm and indifferent, she still retained her fidelity of heart. She had not given her affection to another, but there is still rebuke in his voice. She is charged with a lack of feeling—"See how I persevere in the chill of the night. My locks show the signs of my endurance in the weather, and in seeking shelter, but I cannot leave, although the door of your heart is closed. In spite of the cold and suffering, I knock, and I wait. Open, open to me."

Does this picture of indifference and sloth that we experience too frequently not strike our conscience? We have closed our ears too often to a startling providence, a friendly admonition, an awakening call, and the tender utterances of the Word. We cared only for our present ease and desired to be left in the lap of lethargy and sleep. But all praise, all glory to my Saviour's love. He did not turn from me in anger. He knocked until we were overcome by his goodness, and our hearts responded, "I am yours, return, come in and occupy your throne in my heart."

**5:3. "I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?"**

This is a sad spectacle of the drowsy Church. But it is worse to hear the excuses she makes. She will not arise when her Beloved calls, but she accepts no blame and feels no shame. This is the downward course of evil; it attempts to justify self. Let us resist it, nip it in the bud, or it will soon bear fruit in our lives. Resist it firmly, for it is strong. Resist it resolutely, for it cannot be easily subdued. Like a rolling stone that moves slowly at first, but soon picks up speed. Like a leak, small at the beginning, soon widens into a gush of water.

Eve paused, looked, and then stretched out her hand to pluck the fruit. We shudder and ask, "Would I do such a thing?" But how soon the deed is accomplished! The church does not rise from her couch when she first hears the voice, thinking she should remain there. She thinks that the call is unseasonable, for it was the time for rest. She thinks it is a hard requirement that she put on the clothes she has just taken off and dirty the feet she had just washed. It is better that she should just rest. But think of the folly of such thinking. How little she gained and how much she lost!

It is dreadful to see such madness in those who have experienced communion with the Lord. How easily the eyes can be blinded to the beauty of the Saviour and the ear deaf to his voice! What delusion it is to prefer the bed of indifference, to a walk by the side of the Saviour, to slumber and sleep rather than to engage with him actively!

In this picture, we see how the heart frequently responds when grace first knocks at its door. We raise many excuses, plead for delay, and cry like the man in the parable, "Trouble me not, the door is now shut; and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give to you" (Luke 11:7). Many a young man or woman has been stirred by some event in life, some friendly warning, or some solemn text. But they have objected, "There is still time." They go on to indulge youth, as the world presents its attractions and lures them. They cry, "not yet--not yet, when I have a convenient time, I will shake off these restraints and will arise to seek salvation" (Acts 24:25).

How many unbelievers hear the call to come apart and not to continue in a downward path and pursuits? They hear, but they postpone. They have no thought of final rejection, but yield to the seduction of the present, and they hold on to a hope that at some more suitable time, they will leave all and follow Christ.

**5:4. "My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me."**

The scene continues, full of spiritual teaching. The Saviour, knocking and seeking entrance with the most tender voice, is not tempted to cease his earnest endeavour. He turns away, but not in anger and vexation. His desire grows stronger, and he redoubles his efforts.

He refuses, persists, and puts his hand through the latch. He almost gained entrance, for feelings of remorse began to stir in his beloved. There is no sloth in Christ here and no cold withdrawal. Rather, we see that he is God and not man, for what man would have gone back after such a refusal? The love that burned from everlasting to everlasting endures. He who loved during the deadness of the unregenerate state will love through all the drowsiness of spiritual decline. Although his knocking and his loving voice has been unheeded, yet he redoubles his efforts. Can we sufficiently understand and appreciate such unconquerable grace!

It would take a long time to list the many instances that illustrate the words, "my Beloved put in his hand through the latch-opening." But it was that effort that conquered; the heart was softened and subdued, the feeling stirred. "Shame on my ingratitude! Shame on my cold indifference! Shame on my slothfulness! Shame on my excuses!" Then I cried, "My heart began to pound for Him."

**5:5. "I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt."**

Here, the church awakens into activity. She hurries to open the door, she extends her hand to unloose the bolts and locks, and her hand is covered with the fragrant scent left there by the hand of her Saviour. This perfume represents heavenly grace and shows that, touched by divine grace, the Church attempts to draw back the bolts and locks that keep the Saviour out. The grace that Christ has given and left within us produces more grace in the believer's heart. He gives more grace. Salvation from first to last flows in the deep channel of God's sovereign will.

**5:6. "I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer."**

Christ's gracious efforts succeeded. She has left the couch of sloth. She is stirred and opens the door. Expectant love waits to welcome, but her spirit sinks when he is not there! The spirit had failed her when the voice of love was first heard, but it failed again when she called, and he did not answer! How many thoughts would have crowded into the bewildered mind! Has my loitering spirit caused his departure, and am I now left in desertion?

But reality is very different from her feelings! In grace Christ had called, in grace also, he appeared to leave. The Saviour's merciful design was successful; love is rekindled in her heart, and active desires after Christ are restored. She cannot rest until she has regained the presence of her Lord. But there is a warning here. We may trifle too long, we may loiter and linger until patience can suffer no more.

**5:7. "The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls."**

The believer's life is not an undisturbed sail. Change follows change in our spiritual experience. The morning sun often sets in an evening storm. The voyage commences in calm waters, but rough seas may swell before we reach the harbour. If Christ, however, sits at the helm of the ship, the raging waves will not engulf--the promised rest will be surely reached.

The scene before us illustrates this. The Church was previously indifferent and self-secure, and at ease. She asked not to be interrupted or disturbed. Her main desire was a sleepy existence. This proved to be an unhealthy place. Christ in His grace will send bitter providences to shatter such indifferences.

It is at night. The Church had expected a quiet rest. It is still night when

she leaves her home in distress to search for her absent Lord. She rushes into the street, moving about, searching vigorously. She enquires from all she meets in her path. She can't be satisfied until she finds her Lord again.

She is in a much healthier place now than before! Then she cared for nothing but her ease. Now all she cares for is to find her Lord. There can be no substitute for Christ. Only he can fill the void. Only he can give solace and speak peace.

The reception she receives from the world is not at all sympathetic. She is not encouraged by wise advice or guided in the path of peace. She is not told where to find Christ. Far from it, she is treated with contempt and cruel mocking. Harshness and persecution add to her deep distress. Here we catch a glimpse of how the world treats the followers of Christ. We are told that we must reach the kingdom of heaven through much tribulation (Acts 14:22). Throughout the history of the Church, there have been many sad periods of persecution.

**5:8, 9. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love. What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?"**

Sometimes the church finds sympathy. Some friendly ears will listen to the Church's distress. She seeks their counsel and their prayers, and asks them to make intercession for her, to spread out her case before the Lord, to tell him that her sickness is extreme, that she faints, and that she dies from her intense longings for her Lord.

But still, they do not fully understand her feelings, and it seems strange to them that the Lord should take an interest in her feelings. So, they reply, "How is your beloved better than others?" This question opens the door for a joyful description of the Lord's beauty, grace, and goodness.

**5:10-16. "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dropping liquid myrrh. His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."**

Here, the Church is invited to describe her Lord. Delighted at the question, she quickly enters into a song of praise. But describing his beauty is beyond her ability. His beauty is beyond the powers of words

to describe.

She chooses ten body parts to describe, attempting to bring them to life. But she found it so inadequate! If one picture could contain all the rarest things that nature can boast, the unrivalled excellence, the most surpassing works of art, they melt into nothingness in comparison to her Lord.

The brightness of the midday sun hides its face, and nature sinks into nothing when called to illustrate the beauty and wonder of the Lord. No voice of angel, no thrilling eloquence of man, no brilliant colours of the artist can offer any likeness close to the beauty of the Lord. All efforts fail to describe him. Nothing can be said except, "He is chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." We see, we praise, and we adore.

But the picture before us is intended to call us to perpetual admiration. It calls us to stir up, contemplate, and worship him. Let us learn from these ten particulars that beauty, majesty, and glory are all concentrated in Him, whom our hearts love.

Let us think of him clothed in the glories of essential Deity. He is God over all, blessed forevermore (Romans 9:5). He is as high and great and glorious as God can be. He sits supreme above all that thought can conceive. He reigns forever, the great "I AM." His power is complete omnipotence. His wisdom is perfect omniscience.

Our sight, also, is dazzled when we contemplate his love and condescension in taking on our manhood, that he might be qualified to be the bridegroom of his Church.

Here, we learn that all the eloquence of man is utterly feeble in attempting to represent Christ. If we attempt to draw his picture, we cannot give the slightest likeness to his beauty and glory. It seems redundant to dwell on the particulars that are named here. They might tend more to distract the thought than to enhance the truth of his pre-eminent glory.

## Chapter 6

**6:1. "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?"**

We have heard the Church pour out her heartfelt admiration for her Lord. Her cup was overflowing, and praise had exhausted her vocabulary.

Here we are called to see the result. Earnest praise of the Saviour is not expressed in vain. The Spirit, who prompts, will make it effectual, and those who hear the praises will be affected also. Earnest praise will always be noticed (Matthew 5:16), and those who hear may enquire — "Where is your Beloved gone, O most beautiful of women? Where is your Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with you."

No one is called by grace for himself alone. Faith is not an unfruitful seed; it does not feast at a single table, and it does not hide its pearl of great price but shows it off.

It is a great shame that the lips of believers are silent, and there are no calls inviting to the redeemer's cross. If we had not heard the words of the preacher, if friends had not told us of his grace, we might have been left in darkness, ignorance, and death also. But praise God, we heard, we paused, we listened, we felt interest, and we were convinced. We enquired, "Where shall we find this Saviour?"

Here is an example of those who worked diligently for Christ. They work with joy and with expectation. The husbandman breaks the ground and scatters the seed, hoping the plant will show itself and ripen into a fruitful harvest. So it should be with the believer, who warmly magnifies his Lord with confidence that the word will not return empty.

**6:2, 3. "My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies."**

The lips of the faithful are quick to give instruction. They delight in pointing others to the heavenly path. We have already seen that believers are his garden, and here he has planted his seeds, and here he seeks the fruit of his labour.

So, enquirers are exhorted to come from the barren wilderness, where only thorns and briars grow. They are exhorted to leave the world and the company of the world, whose ways are enmity to God, to break from the chains that bind, to renounce all unprofitable company. Christ does not dwell in this desert, and those who would find him must run to his garden; they must join the flock who walk in the narrow way, attend the ordinances, in which his truth is faithfully proclaimed.

Believers profess to the world that here they enjoy communion with the Lord. Those who dwell in this garden can say, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine, he feeds among the lilies." May we have the grace to call others to Christ!

**6:4. "You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners."**

These are the words of Christ to his church, and faith reads the melting of Christ's loving heart for his church. It lifts us from the earth and consoles the brokenhearted. It strengthens the legs to march actively on the heavenward path. God's Word is filled with these assurances. The story of Christ's coming in the flesh, his taking our nature, his weaving the robe of righteousness, his dying on the cross, are all facts filled with the lustre of his love. So also is this present passage, which speaks of the delight he takes in his Church.

He uses many terms of admiration to display her beauty. The loveliest spots on earth are chosen as fitting symbols. Tirzah was a city in which Canaan's princes dwelt. It was distinguished for its beauty and was admired by all, and so, the Lord says, "you are beautiful, O My love, as Tirzah."

But there was a city yet more renowned than Terzah—Jerusalem in all its glory! For its geographical location, it was the joy of the whole earth. Go round about her, mark her towers, and her walls, pass her gates, and the organisation of her streets. Her palaces are unrivalled for magnificence, her temple is a type of him who is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person (Hebrews 1:3). No spot, no building, could surpass Jerusalem in splendour, and such is the Church's beauty in the eyes of Christ.

Moreover, she appears before Him "majestic as an army with banners." Believers are not called to an inactive life, but to the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). Believers are equipped for this fight, and they are warriors in this fight. Terrible foes assail them, hell, with all its legions, oppose the church, but it puts on the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6:10-20). Their sword resists the Devil, and he flees. Jesus is the Captain of their Salvation; he is their banner, leading them to victory, and this army is a terror to the hosts of evil. No war has ever been lost, no soldier has ever been slain.

**6:5. "Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me."**

Here we read of the power of faith, a power that even conquers Christ. It wrestles with omnipotence and will not let go until it overcomes. We see this in the story of Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32). The Author of this faith gives it strength and enables it to take heaven by storm. The words of Jesus to the woman are sweet to the believing heart: "O woman, great is your faith; be it done unto you as you desire" (Matthew 15:28). How

earnestly we should cry to the Lord in prayer, "Lord, increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5). This grace strengthens in use.

**6:5-7. "Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a creak of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil."**

We move from a general description of the Church's beauty and power to a more specific account of its particular features. Here Christ repeats his previous description of her beauty. The repetition shows his unchanging love, and therefore, our praise should be unchanging. We wonder that he who is all holy and pure should find delight in mere sinful mortals like us. We are forced to ask, "How can he love what we feel to be so unlovely?" The paradox is solved by the great truth that we are saved by grace. The scheme in all its parts is the manifestation of free grace. May the Lord hasten the time when the topstone of the building will be laid with grace!

**6:8, 9. "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her."**

Here, the Lord continues his recommendation of the Church. He shows his preeminence by contrasting it with the palace of some Eastern king. The scene is one of pomp and luxury, with crowds of royal personalities of all ranks, dressed in attractive robes. He gladly turns away from all the vanities of the world, however, to contemplate his bride, the church.

One chaste and lovely image shines throughout the pages of God's Word. We read that the Church is one, not many. It is made up of an innumerable company of souls gathered from every nation, kindred, and people, living in every age, a stream flowing on through the years. But the collected multitude is only one. As there are not two laws and two Gospels, or two heavens, or two sacrifices for sin, so there are not two brides, but one. There is no diversity; the individual members who make up the unity have all been called by the one Spirit. They have all washed their robes and made them white in the one blood (Revelation 7:14). They have all put on the one glorious robe of righteousness, uttered the same confession of miserable sinfulness, walked in the same narrow way of life, professed the one faith, and sought the one home. Soon they will all sing the one song of "Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne; and to the Lamb forever and ever" (Revelation 5:9, 14:3, 15:3).

The unity of the Church is a strong argument for the enforcement of Christian love. Let us strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of

peace (Ephesians 4:3). Believers who injure one another should know that the real injury is inflicted on themselves. "Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but we are all serving the same Lord. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us" (1 Corinthians 12:4-8).

The Church is commended for faithfulness to her Lord. She is the undefiled one. Her heart and her affections are wholly given to Him. There was a time when other lords had dominion over her, but the Spirit has now subdued her heart, and one who reigns supreme. She holds no more affection for the seducing world; she is espoused as a chaste virgin, and this distinguishes her from the many wandering hearts of this polluted earth. In heartfelt sincerity, she professes, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine."

There is no doubt that she is hated by the world (John 15:19), but the world still pays some respect to her, for as Christ can not be hidden, so neither can the Church. The guilty Herod felt the power of John's preaching. Felix trembled before the captive Paul. So the Church still wields influence that cannot be questioned. The man of God is a power wherever he is; "The maidens saw her, and blessed her; yes, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her."

A believer may dwell in some lowly hut with no influence, rank, wealth, or talent, but it is always true that his humble life is not in vain. His life is making an impression. Someone is noticing his peace, blessing, and is learning from it, that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of the life that is to come (1 Timothy 4:8). Worldly land-owners have trouble and sadness in their vast possessions, but the meek believers have the real enjoyment of this earth.

**6:10. "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"**

The praises of the Church are as boundless as the Bridegroom's love. Many images have been used to commemorate her beauty. The theme is not exhausted. The greatest cities of the earth, preeminent in situation and construction, have all helped to illustrate this. But here we are led to expand our vision to the skies. "She looks forward to the morning."

The morning light is a picture of the Lamb's Bride. What can be more lovely than the first streaks of light along the eastern sky! Slender at first, the rays of the sun gradually increase in thickness. As they grow stronger, their beauty amplifies, and the morning mists disappear before them. The plains, the mountains, and the sea throw off the darkness of the night. The inhabitants of earth awaken to their daily

work and go out with gratitude.

Let us see the beauty of the church on each returning day. Where it appears strong in the Lord, and bright in his grace, the darkness of ignorance is no more. In that light, we make new discoveries of God, of his character, and of his work. The light shines more and more until the perfect day.

But let's keep our eyes on the skies as evening shadows come. Darkness begins to spread, obscuring our view. But another bright light comes into view, as the moon appears. It pursues its course, spreading its enchanting light on the earth! It catches our gaze, its soft rays comfort the wakeful shepherd as he tends his flock, the weary traveller is helped along on his way, the mariner on his course on the ocean, and so the lesser light rules the night (Genesis 1:16).

Here, we find faithful instruction for spiritual improvement; in the light of his grace, the church shines forth and spreads her benefits across the earth. Lovely is the moon in heaven, and lovely, also, is Christ's Church on earth.

But the instruction from the skies is not yet exhausted, for the church is exhibited as an army with banners marching to victory, arrayed in the armour of omnipotence, and no enemy can hinder its march heavenward. We shall tread Satan under their feet shortly (Romans 16:20). All praise to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us!

**6:11. "I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom."**

Here again, the garden is presented as a symbol of the Church. A fitting and instructive picture which cannot be studied too often. It is a place enclosed from the wilderness of the world, carefully cultivated, and enriched with the choicest flowers and fruits. It is a place of recreation and delights that gives special pleasure, and the owner is a frequent visitor. With care, he watches the budding fruits, the opening blossoms, the ripening clusters.

Christ's ever-watchful eye surveys his people. He has prepared their hearts as the good ground. He has sown good seed and looks to see that good fruit is the result. It will be a shame on us if his care and his enriching grace should end in barrenness and disappointment. Shame on us if, when he comes and looks for sweet grapes, he finds sour grapes (Isaiah 5:2). The Christian should always desire fruitfulness— "By this my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8). May we be fragrant flowers. May we be trees of righteousness, producing a rich harvest of divine graces. The Lord has provided us with the means for this harvest, the enriching seed of the

heavenly word.

**6:12. "Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince."**

Here, we suddenly meet a glorious exclamation. Who has not known such blissful moments, when light suddenly breaks in, and extraordinary spiritual energy invigorates the heart. The soul seems to be taken up to the heaven of heavens, and Jesus appears with fresh discoveries of his redeeming love. Our names are written in bright colours on his heart and his hands. The celestial portals seem to open wide and we are given a glimpse of the blessedness, a taste of the joys which are at God's right hand. These are times when earth vanishes into the distance, and we grasp with joy deliverance from sin and Satan. We feel the rush that this is heaven, and eternity is secure!

Paul experienced something of this, for he felt like one "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Such wondrous revelations are given as a mark of most special grace, and let us, then, seek by faith to receive such amazing fruits of saving grace.

**6:13. "Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, return, that we may look upon you. Why should you look upon the Shulammitte, as upon a dance before two armies?"**

Here, the church receives a new name. This title seems to intimate that she is a citizen of Salem, the capital of the Prince of peace, and points us to the time when the bride will appear, as the "new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). On that morning may we appear as true Shulamites!

The call to return here is an assurance of his desire for the closest union. "Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever" (Jeremiah 3:12). Our steps may have wandered far in the downward path, but we are not beyond the limits of return.

Notice the reason that he adds to this invitation to return, "... that we may look upon you." We are called to look to Jesus, and to see him is Salvation. We are exhorted to pursue our heavenward path, laying aside every weight, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, because the heavenly Bridegroom's desire is to look on the Church.

If the sight of believers on earth, so full of imperfection, can be a delight to him, what must the sight be in heaven, where we are all transformed into the glorious likeness of the Son of God! "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

The believer's heart is a battlefield. The 'old man', wounded and dying, is strong enough to fight. The 'new man' wrestles for the victory. The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The Shulamite is a company of two armies. She fights the good fight of faith. The victory, the triumph, and the crown will soon be won. Then all struggle--all conflict shall be forever ended.

## Chapter 7

***7:1-5. "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus. Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses."***

We are given another title for the Church here. It shows her royal heritage and her relationship to the King of kings. By nature, she is the offspring of lowest degradation, a child of wrath, the heir of everlasting woe. But through abundant grace, through the plenitude of divine love, a new nature is infused, and she is born again. She is translated from the powers of darkness into the family of God, and is taught to cry, "Abba, Father" (Colossians 1:13; Romans 8:15).

What amazing love! Although it is beyond our understanding and our highest praise, don't let the truth be ignored. In this new creation, the eternal Spirit is the glorious agent. Heaven could not supply a mightier power, the same power that raised Jesus from the tomb. Believers are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides for ever, are regarded as even now sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 1:23). They live as heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). They have been called to "Go out from their midst, and be separate from them" (2 Corinthians 6:17), and they have received the assurance, "I will be a father to, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).

The Church, then, is invested with heavenly beauty. The passage before us is filled with allegorical similitudes, and the objects selected to show her beauty are preeminently suited. There is a rich feast here for contemplation, and it invites the mind to indulge in thoughts of the exquisite beauty of the human body.

There are a lot of details here, but let it suffice us to say generally, that

the church is portrayed as lovely with all loveliness, as beautiful in all beauty, as graceful in all graces, as charming in every charm, as attractive in every attraction, as clothed with robes befitting her royal state, as worthy of her Father's house, as exciting by her perfect body the Bridegroom's admiring love.

"The king is held captive in your queenly tresses." He stands captivated in admiration of his beloved. Let this passage fill us with grateful joy, for we should be thankful for such revelations of our Saviour. It is designed to win us over to a more constant gaze on Jesus. As we behold him, we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). As the rays of the sun ripen fruit, so the warmth from meditation on him will cause our graces to expand. Let us live, looking unto Jesus, until we shall see Him face to face.

**7:6-9. "How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine. It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth."**

Here, in general terms, the Church's loveliness is presented again. It strengthens our faith and encourages us to rest on Christ's love. How can doubts and fears keep their hold on us with these rich assurances? The believer who lays hold on these will stand firm, joyfully march forward — "I am dear to the heart of Jesus." What peace of mind comes from words of the Saviour: "Oh, how delightful you are, my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!"

In his grace, Christ specifies particular features of beauty. We are called to mark those objects that most captivate the eyes in the gardens, the orchards, and the plantations. The beauty seen here is described as depicting the Church's grace. Notice the tall, stately palm tree; its waving boughs are laden with abundant dates. When we enter the vineyard, the vine is filled with wide, spreading branches, with clusters of delicious fruit. The orchard also has the sight and smell of apples! As we look, we admire, and we are taught how precious the Church is in the sight of the Redeemer.

But let us not forget that all this beauty is derived from him, his love, and is the work of his hand. In themselves, Christ's people are all deformed and loathsome. By nature, they have no beauty. But in grace, that vile appearance has disappeared, and beauty has been given in exchange.

But where are the believer's sins? Christ has removed them as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He has buried them deep in the

ocean of his redeeming merits, and he has cast them behind God's back forever. Christ's blood has been sprinkled over them, and they are whiter than the whitest snow. Omniscience may search, but it searches in vain, and they can no longer be brought to sight. No spot, no wrinkle, no defect, no blemish, no fault, no shortcoming can be discovered. "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If grace is the absence of everything ungraceful, how lovely does the Church appear to Christ!

But there is not only the absence of everything that displeases, but there is also the presence of all that is beautiful. Not only is the 'old man' destroyed, but the 'new man' is raised up after the likeness of God, created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Likeness to our Elder Brother is worked in us. Is Christ lovely? So, also, is the Church. The righteousness of Christ is spread around her, and with gratitude, we hear the assurance, "Oh, how delightful you are, my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!"

**7:10. "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me."**

Christ presents his glories to the Church, and it is encouraging to trace them and to study them with eyes enlightened by grace. Here, we find our faith strengthened.

What confidence, what power is given to the believer, and what burden is too heavy for the one who can say, "I am my Beloved's." Christ, as the eternal Creator, has the right to every faculty and power of our minds and bodies. Of his own sovereign will, he called us into being from nothing, from the dust of the earth, he gave us living bodies, and into these bodies, by his Spirit, he breathed the breath of life. We have no right to regard ourselves in any sense as our own property. Our minds should always ask, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

We rob Christ if we use our bodies, minds, and powers in the service of others and have no service for him. The soul that can say, "I am Christ's by creation" is happy, but it is better to say, "I am his by redemption." We had sold ourselves into an enemy's hands. Another lord had taken dominion over us and chained us to his service. We lived as slaves to the devil. But Christ appeared to rescue us. The powers of darkness held us fast, but they held us in vain against the powers of Christ. He hurls the prince of darkness from his throne; he tramples him beneath his feet, and he says to each of his own children, "Come forth to holy liberty." And so, it is the happy soul that feels, "I am my Beloved's. He has delivered me from the tyrant's yoke." Shame on those who return to serve that tyrant from whom they have been rescued!

But believers were deeply in God's debt. They had robbed him whom they should have served. They had defrauded him who was due their allegiance. Justice demanded that they should pay the ultimate price,

for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). But Christ appeared. He asks, "What is the price?" The answer came clearly, "It is everlasting death, but substitutionary payment is allowed," and Christ replied, "Behold me, my deity gives infinitude to my every act. On the Cross I will make complete satisfaction." Justice requires no more.

Happy, then is the soul that feels, "I am my Beloved's. He has bought me with an all-sufficient and infinite price."

The believer also realises that he is Christ's by his own voluntary surrender. He has listened to his inviting calls in the pages of the Word; he has heard his loving voice and has been made willing in the day of Christ's power (Psalm 110:3). Heavenly love has melted the rocky heart and turned enmity into love. It has prompted the cry, "Now to be yours, and only yours, I come, dear Lord, I come." Happy is the soul that can realise, "I am my Beloved's by my own free choice, by my willing surrender."

***7:11-13. "Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages, let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved."***

It is refreshing to get out of the city into the country, because rural scenes bring joy, and it is also spiritually sweet to spend some time in the meadows and the countryside. There are object lessons on all sides that present pictures of Christ, and we should cultivate a taste of heaven among the things of earth.

Here, there is an invitation to go into the country. It is not clear who actually said these words. Is Christ the speaker, or the Church? We cannot go far astray if we join together both voices. Reciprocal expressions like these are frequently found together in Scripture.

"Come" is a tender call from Jesus to his people. He would not have them stay apart from him. He desires them to bring him to their very heart. "Come unto Me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

This call is also found frequently on the lips of the believers. The absence of the Beloved is a miserable existence. He follows him with invitations to come in and occupy each portion of his heart, never more to leave him for a moment. And longing for the heavenly home, and for the eternal joys, he cries, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly" (Revelation 22:20). The believer desires the presence of the Lord in all places, not only in the crowded cities, but in the loneliness of fields and villages. Without him, every place is an empty wilderness. With him, every place

is like the Garden of Eden.

There is work for the believer in the crowded streets, and in the quiet villages, there is work at home and abroad, but if that work will prosper, Jesus must grant his presence. "If Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here" (Exodus 33:15).

We must not delay in seeking work with our Lord Jesus. "Let us get up early and go out to the vineyards." Christ shines as an example. Rising while it was still dark, He went forth to commune with His God (Mark 1:35). But where should we go for these early visits? To the places where there are fruits of righteousness. Christ marks the believer's progress in the works of holiness. He sows good seed, and he loves to see how it responds and produces crops. May he never find us as fruitless gardens, or as barren trees. May it never be said to us "cut it down, why should it use up the ground" (Luke 13:7).

There are sweet promises for the fruitful vineyard; "there will I give you My love," I reveal your name inscribed on my heart, I revive you with fresh discoveries, and renewed assurances.

And so, we have the invitation of Scripture, "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink--even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk — it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? (Isaiah 55:1). "Listen," the Saviour says, "I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul!"

## Chapter 8

**8:1-4. "Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother - she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, and juice of pomegranate. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."**

Here, the Church shows an intense desire for the closest communion with her beloved Lord. The affection of a sister is a fitting model. Suppose the sister has been mourning the absence of a dear brother, when suddenly she sees him in the streets. She cannot hold back, but kisses his cheeks. She clings to him and brings him to her mother's house, where they are welcomed. She comforts him and gives him the best wine. She shows every token of affection. It is a picture of the intensity of domestic love, of close intimacy between a loving brother and sister.

In this picture, we may read volumes of instruction. Jesus is the believer's brother! In his grace, he has condescended to take on our nature, to be born one of the human family, bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh. "He is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:11). He is qualified as one with man's family to be our representative, to undertake the office of our advocate, to bear the penalties of sin, to fulfil the righteousness required by God's justice. As our substitute, he can hang accursed on the tree and shed the blood of atonement to remove our guilt.

By being made like us in all things, except in sin, he has a heart to sympathise with us in our trials and in our conflicts. He has tasted the cup of human sorrow; he can feel for those who are called to drink the same, and so he can stick close, yes, closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

As our brother, he invites us to fellowship with him. We may draw near and pour into his heart all the sorrow of our own hearts. He will be quick to listen and quick to comfort. We can also assure him of the warmth of our own devotion to him. We can hold him close to our hearts and show our affection. It is painful to think that moments like these would be interrupted, and so we should be watchful for any passion that intrudes and threatens to separate us.

We should earnestly seek that no interruption should mar this happiness! The portals should be barred against the entrance of antagonistic feelings and desire. The world should be utterly avoided and shunned. The cry should be, 'Away, away, all that might cause the

beloved Lord to take departure'. The voice will be heard, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please."

**8:5. "Who is coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?"**

The scene is changed; it's completely new. The Gospel spreads a feast of things new and old. It is a cluster of fresh, budding fruit. We see a woman emerging from the wilderness; she is not alone. There is someone near her, and she is leaning on him. All her weight is laid on him. It is clear that this is the Church drawing on her Lord's support. They are coming out of the wilderness together.

The believer is called to leave all for Christ, to come out, and to be separate from a polluted world, to shun its pleasures, to turn from its smiles, to disregard its displeasure, to close the ear to its enticing voice, to reject its attractive cup, to trample on its principles, and to feel that the world at its very core is opposed to Christ. These truths are taught by the Holy Spirit, and the believer hears the voice of the Spirit, arises and departs from the world.

The believer loses nothing by abandoning the world. It is no Garden of Eden; it is a wasteland. It is no vineyard, no peaceful meadow, no lovely grove. It is a desert, wild, dismal, and unsatisfying. It is an enemy territory, filled with danger. There is no manna here, no refreshing streams. Its food is poison, it produces thorns, thistles and briars, there is no nurture, but disappointment, misery, and suffering. The believer is called to come up out of this cheating and deluding wilderness.

But how can he obey? He is weak and powerless in himself. But a mighty arm is near. Jesus says, "I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with my righteousness right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). Jesus extends the arm of his omnipotence and cries, "Come, lean on me."

The first step cannot be taken without Jesus, and there is no advance without him. But he is near, willing, and able to help. It is a steep ascent to heaven, but leaning on Jesus, the upward call may be run without delay. The path is slippery; we are liable to stumble. There are snares also, and pits, but leaning on him, we are held up and safely guided.

There are afflictions also that weigh the heart down; tears and sighs are the portion of the pilgrim. But these trials, troubles, and distresses will not overwhelm the one leaning on Jesus. We stand on an unshakable rock. Temptations may deceitfully attack us, and at any moment, we are on the brink of downfall. But leaning on him, we will rise triumphantly.

Let us be wise. Let us accept Jesus' offer. Let us cast on him the burden of our every care, anxiety, and fear (1 Peter 5:7). Let him take the

weight of our salvation. Self-righteousness is a broken reed; let us lean on him as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His rod and staff will comfort. So, let us pass through life leaning on our Beloved. Let us enter heaven leaning on the arm of Jesus.

**8:5. "Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor."**

Another picture of Christ's tender love follows. Here we see a helpless infant drawing the first breath of life. The child has no home and no one to nurse it. It is born in the open air, exposed to all the elements of the changing seasons. It finds its cradle in the leaves of some orchard tree. We do not have to go far to reach the significance of this allegory.

The Holy Spirit provides a clear explanation through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 16:1ff). There, the miserable state of Judah is described, and the Lord appears in love to provide for her, to clothe her in lovely clothing as a bride fit for his palace. Let the Holy Spirit's words open up the meaning here.

We read that at the time of her birth, "... no one cared about you. Your umbilical cord was left uncut, and you were never washed, rubbed with salt, or dressed in warm clothing. No one had the slightest interest in you; no one pitied you or cared for you. On the day you were born, you were dumped in a field and left to die, unwanted. But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, 'Live!'"

The Lord continues, "Then I bathed you and washed off your blood, and I rubbed fragrant oils into your skin. I gave you expensive linen and silk clothing, beautifully embroidered, and sandals made of fine leather. I gave you lovely jewelry, bracelets, and beautiful necklaces, a ring for your nose, earrings for your ears, and a lovely crown for your head. And so you were made beautiful with gold and silver. Your clothes were made of fine linen and were beautifully embroidered. You ate the finest foods—fine flour, honey, and olive oil—and became more beautiful than ever. You looked like a queen, and so you were!"

Then he adds, "Your fame soon spread throughout the world on account of your beauty, because the splendour I bestowed on you perfected your beauty, says the Sovereign Lord."

So, the Spirit is teaching us to see how Jesus looked on his Church, in her exposed and despised condition, and in his tender love raised her up to be the Bride of heaven.

**8:6, 7. "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot**

***quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised."***

When the Church realises how tenderly the Lord had cared for her, she prays for more manifestations of his love; "set me as a seal upon your heart" — deeply engraved in his affections! "Set me as a seal upon Your arm" — as a signet ring that you can see continually!

Who can describe the power of Christ's conquering love! It is as strong as death. Death is indeed a mighty enemy. It comes out victorious over us all; it does not recognise rank. Poverty is not too low for it, and riches are not too high. It throws kings from their thrones and carries the poor man from his hut. Old age and youth are both equally subject to death; talent and learning, ignorance and the uneducated alike, succumb to it. Its jealousy is as cruel as the grave. It has no heart to relent, it drives crowds to its dwelling place, and the graves are always filling and never full.

Such is the power of love. It is devouring, as coals vehemently burn, and turn into ashes all that it touches. Floods of water pour on it in vain; it licks up the water and rages on.

Love will take nothing in exchange for its beloved. It is entirely centered on one object; there are no rivals, and it will not rest until it takes possession of the loved one. Here we see the essence of Christ's love for us. It is omnipotent and victorious, it burns perpetually with most ardent warmth, and it is unquenchable. It rejects all in pursuit of the Church to which his heart is given.

***8:8. "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for?"***

Here, we have an allegory that unfolds the Gospel truth. Here, faith looks away from self to an aggressive power. It does not concentrate on its own enjoyments, but on the whole need of man with penetrating compassion.

Jesus said, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd" (John 10:16). In the verse before us, the Church echoes the words of Jesus — "We have a little sister." Faith looks on the inhabitants of earth with compassion, as our family bond in the common bond of humanity; partakers of the same flesh and blood. They breathe the same breath of life, they are inhabitants of the same earth, they tread the same soil, are warmed by the same sun, and are alike travelling through the doors of death to an undying eternity.

But they are not alike in their spiritual condition. Some are enlightened by the light of the gospel, have been taught by the Spirit, fled for refuge to Christ, and are looking to heaven as their everlasting home. From

their high pinnacle of blessedness, they look with pity on a multitude who do not share this grace. They see them bound in Satan's chains, ignorant of God and his love. They know nothing of Christ and his full salvation.

The sight of these lost multitudes melts the believing heart. Some of these lost multitudes dwell at their very door, live in their city, and they are utterly unprepared to meet their God. Faith sees what their doom will be when Christ shall appear to gather up his jewels. These compassionate cries will be portrayed in the words, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts--what shall we do for our sister on the day when she shall be spoken for?"

**8:9. "If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar."**

Here, we learn that we have a two-fold duty towards humanity's destitute. First, we are to labour diligently, in faith, in love, and in prayer for their conversion. Second, we are to use every effort to win them to the knowledge of the Lord, to proclaim Jesus to them with all his willingness and power to save, to sound aloud the precious call of the Gospel. "Turn to me, and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22). "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

But we must not give up on them. When the little sister is brought home to the household of faith, received as a living part of the true household of the redeemed, resting as a wall on the good foundation, we should do all in our power to lead onward in the course of faith. We should strive that converted souls should grow in grace, that they should shine more and more in the splendour of truth and holiness, that they should be set as palaces of silver built on this wall.

**8:10. "I am a wall, and my breasts were like towers; then was I in His eyes as one who finds peace."**

Here we have the glad resting place of true converts. They realise that they are built together as a habitation of God. It is a work of grace entirely — "We have found favour." Let us not forget that salvation from first to last is all of free and sovereign grace. Grace began, grace carries on, and grace will bring us home. "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8)

**8:11. "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon; he let out his vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring its fruit a thousand pieces of silver."**

Allegorical pictures have filled this book with gospel truth. Each view has been filled with beautiful teaching. The same character at the beginning is still here at the end of the book.

King Solomon appears as the owner of a vineyard at Baal-hamon. But a

greater than Solomon is here. Jesus has a chosen people. These people were given to him by his Father in the councils of eternity. They were loved by him with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). They have been redeemed from all sin by the shedding of his precious blood, and rescued from every enemy by his almighty power. They have been guarded with watchful care, as his treasure, his delight, his sister and his spouse.

This Church shall never perish. All the ransomed shall be gathered in, and presented as a glorious company without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). This vineyard is at Baal-hamon; no special truth is conveyed here. In parables, embellishments are added to fill up the portrait, but not to teach dogmatic truth. It is entrusted to keepers because Christ employs his ministering servants to dress and cultivate it, to diligently plant, water, prune, and guard. Christ looks to them to bring fruit to the heavenly storehouse.

**8:12. *"My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred."***

The Church now speaks of herself as the owner of a vineyard. There are times when believers are negligent of their own hearts; it is a common lamentation, "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." But here the Church speaks of how she cares for her vineyard. How watchful we should be of our hearts, in case grace should decline, and weeds and briars should grow up, and the little foxes should creep in and spoil the tender grapes.

But to Christ and his glory all the produce of the believer should be devoted. The will and the power to strive in his cause come from him alone. To him praise should be given, but friends and ministering servants render help to the Saviour.

**8:13. *"O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice; let me hear it."***

Believers are depicted as dwelling in the Lord's garden, with happy companions surrounding them. But Jesus cries, "Don't let this communion be restricted to them, come and commune with me. It is good for believers to talk often with one another, but the main communion of the believer should be with the Chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One. We should be in prayer; we should always be drawing near to him. We should always be lifting up our voice in praise. His ear delights to hear.

**8:14. *"Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices."***

The song ends with an earnest cry. It calls on the Lord to come with all speed and fill the heart. Look at the gazelles and deer skipping over the hills, and we should pray that Jesus would come and dwell in our hearts

with the same speed! But especially let us pray that he would hasten his kingdom and establish his gracious reign of righteousness. "Make haste, my Beloved." "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."