Song of Solomon - Commentaries by Edward B. Dennett

The Name Above Every Name: Papers on the Excellency, Exaltation and Supremacy of Christ, Thy Name is as Ointment Poured Forth

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In this language is portrayed the preciousness of Christ (as the Bridegroom) to the bride. This will be at once perceived if the context be examined. “Let Him kiss me,” cries the bride, “with the kisses of His mouth: for [now addressing Him directly] Thy love is better than wine.” It is not so much the love itself, as the enjoyment of the love, of which she speaks; this it is which is “better than wine.” Every renewed heart will respond to this statement, for while the love of Christ is ever beyond all our thoughts, infinite and unspeakable, it is only as we enjoy it that we in any measure enter into, or appreciate it. But when the heart expands in the power of the Spirit to its blessed influences and constraint, when it opens, without let or hindrance, to the inflowing of its mighty tides, then the soul learns experimentally the marvelous character of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Another thing is equally true. The more we taste of the love of Christ, the more we desire it. Every experience of it begets an ardent longing for a larger measure of it. Thus, if the bride had not previously known something of the Bridegroom’s affection, she would never have uttered this passionate desire.

It is, moreover, through the heart that all divine knowledge is received; and hence, as here, the bride passes from the expression of her estimate of the enjoyment of the Bridegroom’s love, to a declaration of the effect of His excellencies and perfections. Her heart apprehends, through the enjoyment of His love, the savor of His “good ointments.” Still, it may be remarked, in the language of another, that “however strong” the bride’s “affections may be, they are not developed according to the position in which Christian affections, properly so-called, are formed. They differ in this respect. They do not possess the profound repose and sweetness of an affection that flows from a relationship already formed, known, and fully appreciated, the bonds of which are formed and recognized, that counts upon the full and constant acknowledgment of the relationship, and that each party enjoys, as a certain thing, in the heart of the other. The desire of one who loves, and is seeking the affections of the beloved object, is not the sweet, entire, and established affection of the wife, with whom marriage has formed an indissoluble union. To the former, the relationship is only in desire, the consequence of the state of heart; to the latter the state of heart is the consequence of the relationship.”

This distinction should be well weighed and apprehended, for it contains the key to the interpretation of the “Song of Songs.” But it is still true, whether in the heart of the bride, or in that of the Christian, that love is the means of, the capacity for, divine knowledge; that, in a word, he that loves most knows most. (See 1 Cor. 8:1-3; Eph. 1:18—reading “heart,” instead of “understanding.”) Mary Magdalene is a striking illustration of this point. Peter and John had more light than she, for they (or certainly John) had seen that the sepulcher was empty, and had believed, while she was in utter darkness as to the resurrection. And yet it was to Mary that the Lord revealed Himself. The two disciples, having satisfied themselves that the sepulcher was bereft of its prey (and John, at least, believing that the Lord had risen Victor over death), “went away again unto their own home.” But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping. Engrossed, in the intensity of her affection, with her Object, she was rooted to the spot; having lost Christ she had lost everything, and all the world was but a sepulcher to her if Christ were not living. The state of her heart was right, although her spiritual understanding was not enlightened; and hence it was that the Lord could come and disclose Himself to her, and make her the glad messenger of the blessed tidings that henceforward He associated His brethren with Himself in heaven, before His Father and God, in His own place and relationship.

If the reader have understood the divine principles which have been enunciated, he will easily comprehend the language of the bride, which must now be considered. “Because of the savor of Thy good ointments,” she says, “Thy name is as ointment poured forth.” The “good ointments” will represent for us the blessed fragrance of His excellent perfections, as seen in His life, in His acts of tenderness and grace, as well as in His words, and in His walk of entire dependence and obedience before God in His pathway through this world. They will, doubtless, be apprehended and enjoyed in the intimacy of His own presence, in His manifested relationships with the soul, in His ways and personal dealings. The bride, indeed, could not have known the savor of His good ointments in any other way. And it is ever true that the nearer we are to Christ the more fully we enter upon the experience of the beloved disciple, who was admitted to the intimacy of reposing upon the Lord’s breast, and the clearer will be our perception of His beauty and grace. We may be much impressed by report and testimony, even when at a distance like the Queen of Sheba, but it is only when, like her, we hear and see for ourselves, that we are lost in adoration in the presence of the fragrance of the good ointments. If, therefore, we would be absorbed with the sense of His graces and beauties we must press on with the two disciples, drawn onward by His attractions, to the place where He dwells. Having part with Him there, the savor of His excellencies will constitute the perpetual joy and rejoicing of the soul.

Before proceeding further it should be noticed that the sweet savor of the life of Christ, as may be gathered from Leviticus 2, was first and foremost for God. The priests might eat of the tine flour, mingled with oil, of which the meat-offering was composed, but all the frankincense thereof was to be burned with a part of the offering upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord. How blessed to know this! If there had not been a single soul upon the face of the earth to delight in the savor of the good ointments of Christ, His life would not have been in vain, inasmuch as it brought glory to God and filled His heart with infinite joy. No! our blessed Lord could not have wasted His sweetness “upon the desert air,” because there was One whose eyes ever rested upon Him with unspeakable complacency, noting with joy the perfection of His every thought, and act, and word, and step. It was this which drew forth from the overflowing heart of God the words, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And the more Christ was tested—and He was tested in every variety of way, even by the holy fire of the altar itself—the more abundantly did His sweet savor flow forth to gratify the heart of His God. We call attention to it, because if the bride is, if we ourselves are, permitted to participate in the enjoyment of the sweet savor of His life, to feed upon the perfections of His entire devotedness to the glory of His God, it is only because God has first had His portion, and because He, in His ineffable grace, has called us to share in His own delight in the pathway and person of His beloved Son.

Remark also that it is through the savor of the good ointments that His name, the revelation of all that He is, is spread abroad, as the fragrance of ointment poured forth. In this way, as expressed in the hymn—

“Like fragrance on the breezesHis name is spread abroad.”

Illustrations of this abound in the gospels. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria.” As we read in another place, “And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tire and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it; but He could not be hid.” No I blessed Lord, the savor of Thy good ointments had gone abroad on every hand, making Thee everywhere known, so that Thy name had become as the sweet fragrance of ointment poured forth to all who were burdened with distress and sorrow, to the weary and needy souls amongst Thy people.

This is doubtless only one side of this precious truth; for what our scripture brings before us is rather the soul’s entrancement with the preciousness of Christ through the apprehension of His various excellencies as displayed in Himself and His ways. Still it is always through our needs that we first get to Christ and learn what He is in His love and grace. Then, when our needs have been met and satisfied, we are at leisure, set at liberty from ourselves, and at liberty in His presence, to contemplate Himself. The savor of His good ointments, indeed, scarcely steals into the soul with its gladdening refreshment until every question affecting ourselves and our relationship with God has been settled. In rare cases Christ Himself may be known at the commencement of the spiritual life; but generally speaking, it is a troubled conscience which has to be appeased, through the efficacy of the blood of Christ, before we are free to survey His glorious perfections. Then, as these surprise and awaken the soul’s delight, His name, even the very mention of it, will fill our hearts with the sense of its sweetness and fragrance, and produce such emotions as can only be expressed in adoring worship at His feet.

Another thing should be mentioned. The savor of the good ointments of Christ may flow out through the holy lives of His people. Every trait, every perfection exhibited by Himself in His walk through this world may be reproduced in those that are His. Look, for example, at the precepts and exhortations of the epistles. Every one of them has been perfectly exemplified in Christ; and unless this is remembered, so that they may be associated with Himself as the living Word, they will become hard and legal obligations. Christ in us, Christ our life, as set forth in Colossians, is to be followed by the display of Christ through us, in the power of the Holy Spirit. For this we need to be much in His company; for the more we are with Him and occupied with Him, the more we shall be transformed into His likeness, and the more certainly will the savor of His good ointments be spread abroad. And this will be a mighty testimony to what He is; for in this case His name will, through us, be as ointment poured forth; the sweet savor of the name of Christ will flow forth from our walk as well as from our words. The Apostle Paul uses the very words in speaking of his preaching, when he says, “We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ”; and in a subsequent chapter (2 Cor. 4) he points out that testimony is connected with the life as well as with the lip. As we meditate upon it, may we not say, “What a privilege! What a mission, to be sent out into the world to make known the savor of the good ointments of Christ, that His name may, through us, be as ointment poured forth!”

The effect of this has yet to be noticed: “therefore do the virgins love thee.” The fragrance of the name of Jesus attracts the hearts of the virgins—not of all God’s people, be it observed, but only of the virgins. A very distinct thought is connected in Scripture with the virgin. It is character, moral character, speaking as it does of the absence of defilement, of uncontamination with the polluting influences of the world (see Rev. 14:4). Virgins, therefore, stand in this scripture for those who have been enabled, through grace, to maintain a holy separation from the defilements of the scene through which they are passing, those whose hearts have been kept true to Christ, and guarded in loyalty to Him through the sense of His claims, and of His love. A heart possessed of Christ is fortified against the most seductive allurements of the world. It is absorbing affection which always distinguishes the virgin; and this affection is ever intensified and deepened by every new discovery of the perfectness of Christ. In other words, those who partake of the virgin character always respond to the display of the preciousness of Christ. He being the sole object of their hearts, they are in the condition of soul to enter into, and enjoy, His beauties. They will detect His presence, the blessed fragrance of His words and His acts, where others will observe nothing. They live in His presence; they are wholly for Him; and hence it is the delight of Christ to disclose Himself to them in such attractive ways as to increase and elicit their affections towards Himself.

It follows from what has been said that the state of our souls may be discerned by the effect produced upon us by the name of Jesus. If our hearts are careless and irresponsive when He is the subject of conversation or presentation, we cannot be in communion with the heart of God. Why even the name of a beloved object on earth will produce pleasurable emotions. How much more should the name of Christ, the object of God’s heart—and also of ours if we know Him—awaken within us holy feelings of delight, which can only be expressed in praise and adoration!

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