Song of Solomon - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Faith's Choice

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As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love (S of S 2:3, 4).

The world may be compared to a forest containing a great variety of trees; and the speaker here boasts of the superiority of the tree he has made choice of over all other trees of the wood. He finds that the apple tree (or rather the citron tree) meets all his necessities; and not only affords him shelter and safety, but yields sweet and refreshing fruit. No tree, not even the lofty pine, or the majestic cedar, so suits him as the citron tree; for there not only is he sheltered from the sun's burning rays, but his hunger and thirst are fully satisfied.

Man naturally craves something. He thirsts for what he has not, and has an aching void in his heart, which he vainly seeks to satisfy. As the powers of intellect become developed, and tastes and inclinations formed, so people may be seen selecting objects to interest their minds and meet their wishes. But turn where they may, and have what they may, their experience is that all under the sun is vanity and vexation of spirit. Still, if one object brings its sorrowful disappointment, they pursue another, and it is to be feared that many fritter away life with no better experience than running from one thing to another in this evil world, seeking rest, and finding none.

Some persons most diligently addict themselves to a money- making system. Money is their heart's object. Gold is their god. Every thing with them is valueless, except it increase their wealth. Oh, how many in this forest-like world have selected for themselves a tree which may be called money! They strive for rest, but never obtain it. They are said to be rich, but they often feel very poor. Others may think them satisfied, but they know nothing of true contentment. They often painfully exemplify that

the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10);

and prove the truth of the inspired writer, that

he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase (Eccl. 5:10).

There are others who do not care so much for money as for pleasure. They make everything bend to self-indulgence. They pity the covetous and miserly, while they squander their substance in revelry and mirth. They are devoted to the pleasures of sin, and know nothing higher than the gratification of the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes, and the pride of life. Of all the trees of the wood, none suits them like the tree of pleasure. Their pursuits are various, according to their means and tastes; but ease and pleasure they will have if possible. They know nothing better than present indulgence.

Others may be found who care little either for wealth, or the fascinating pleasures of fashionable life. Their deportment is quiet and perhaps retiring, but their minds eagerly pursue science, as it is called. Time, wealth, health, and everything else are easily sacrificed to this object. They find its present interest sufficiently encouraging to promote diligent perseverance, and its supposed harmlessness becomes an excuse for the most moral to engage in it to any extent. Science is their heart's choice. They know not that the Scripture classes the desires of the mind with the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:3), and, perhaps, seldom consider that when they die, their accumulated masses of philosophy die with them.

There is another class of persons who make fame their object. Ambitious of leaving a great name behind them, they are almost willing to accomplish it at the expense of self-sacrifice. As they become loaded with honors, so they judge their course prosperous; until at length the cold hand of death proves, to their eternal sorrow, that

man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish (Psa. 49:12).

Such are some of the classes of character around us, and whether it be money, pleasure, science, or fame, they stand like so many trees in a large forest, and some make choice of one, and some of another. But there is a tree, once planted at Golgotha, differing from every other, because of the present comfort and eternal blessing it imparts to all who take refuge there. It is the cross of the Son of God, who was crucified for sinners, that is the object of the believer's choice. In vain does the awakened conscience find any other satisfying object. He knows that no amount of wealth can purchase peace; no earthly pleasure can relieve his heavy heart; no philosophical researches can ease him of his weight of guilt; no honor from men can secure to him the immortal honor of being a child of God. In Immanuel's cross, he reads that God is love. In the bleeding Savior, he beholds God providing a sin-cleansing fountain. On Calvary's tree, he sees sins judged and purged for every one that believeth. In the person of Jesus crucified, he finds infinite love, holiness, and truth. The more he knows of Jesus, the more he learns of His perfect hatred of sin, and boundless grace to sinners. His self-sacrificing devotedness, in life and in death, shows us how He pleased not Himself, but loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. The spotlessness of His person, the amazing love of His heart, the perfection of His work, the suitability of His offices, so fill the believer with joy and gladness, that he can truly exclaim,

As the citron tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons (S of S 2:3).

In our meditation on these verses, we shall find instruction concerning the believer's choice, his rest, his joy, his exercises, and his privileges. Let us consider each of these points separately.

1. THE BELIEVER'S CHOICE.

My beloved (S of S 2:3).

There is none like the Lord Jesus to the believer. He sees nothing so attractive and glorious. Christ is the object of his heart's affections. In Him he beholds the glory of God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. He finds Him to be incomparably sweet. He esteems Christ as the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. He has fled to Him for salvation, and found peace to his wounded soul through faith in His blood, so that he can truly say,

my beloved,

my Redeemer, my righteousness, and my life. Therefore, Christ is very dear to him. Among all the hosts of earth or heaven, he could point to Jesus and say,

This is my beloved, and this is my friend (S of S 5:16).

Personal attachment to Jesus is the feeling of every true believer —

Unto you therefore which believe He is precious (1 Pet. 2:7).

In whatever aspect Jesus is viewed, in every way, and in every office, He is the beloved of the believer's soul. He could part with everything rather than Christ. It is Christ Himself that the believer's heart is set upon, and his language is —

2. THE BELIEVER'S REST.

I sat down (S of S 2:3).

Jesus only gives rest to the burdened soul, and this He does according to His own word —

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

This the Christian realizes by faith, according to that Scripture,

We which have believed do enter into rest (Heb. 4:3).

The speaker here says,

I sat down under His shadow (S of S 2:3);

and so the Christian not only knows that Christ crucified is the way of salvation, but he avails himself of it, he comes to Him, he enters in, he sits down in peace, because God provides rest for his sin-burdened conscience. The awakened soul, having proved the insufficiency of human expedients, finds in the cross of the Son of God every thing to remove his guilt, quiet his fears, and fill him with brightest hope. A Spirit-led sinner never loses the burden of his sins till he beholds Jesus crucified; for there, and there alone, he sees the holy God putting away sin to give him righteousness and peace, and presenting pardon to the guilty, life for the dead, and salvation for the lost. He comes, therefore, and finds rest. By faith he sits beneath the shadow of the cross, and finds himself for ever sheltered from the wrath of God, because Christ was made sin and a curse for him. He rests in the knowledge that God is his Savior, that his iniquities were laid upon Jesus, that the stroke of Divine vengeance fell upon Him; thus suffering for sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring him to God. In this way the believer realizes that God loves him, welcomes him, pardons, and justifies him from all things. Every question is answered, every fear removed, and love, gratitude, and hope take possession of his soul. Let none expect rest apart from a believing view of the value of the death of Christ; for —

There are many anxious souls who have not rest. Why is it? Because they seek it not by faith; they have not sat down under the shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be taken up with doctrines, and lack rest. They may be diligent in observing ordinances, and lack rest. They may be much exercised about their frames, feelings, and experiences, and yet lack rest. It must be Christ and His finished work to give rest — Christ Himself — Christ only. If they look anywhere else, they are off the true ground of rest. As long as the eye is turned inward upon self — good self, bad self, or religious self, self in any form — they must lack rest, because Christ is the only Savior, the only shelter, the only object of faith, the only resting-place that God has provided for sinners. The Divine verdict has long ago gone forth as to man's thoughts being only evil, and that continually, and his heart desperately wicked; in fact, that in him is no good. And when the soul takes this ground before God, and looks simply to His grace, that has met us in our ruin and helplessness in the death of Christ, it finds deliverance from slavish fear and guilt, and the fullest reason for confidence and rest. When we thus find rest, we begin to labour for Christ, and find that His yoke is easy, and His burden light.

3. THE BELIEVER'S JOY.

I sat down under His shadow with great delight (S of S 2:3).

Christ is our joy, as well as our rest; yea, we joy in God through Him. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord always. The assurance of our being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ makes us very happy. We can say with the apostle Peter,

Whom having not seen, we love; in whom though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (see 1 Pet. 1:8).

The new song is put into our mouth. The contemplation of the eternal blessings we have in Christ our Lord gives us great delight. We envy not the worldling's mirth. We know that his joy is like the crackling of thorns under a pot, which continues but for a moment, and then expires for ever; but joy in the Holy Ghost, which we have in Christ, is sometimes too deep, too pure, and too full of blessing to be uttered.

How is it that believers are not happier? Because the death of Christ is not more simply and habitually contemplated as the foundation of all joy and blessing. It may be said, that Jesus is not now on the cross, nor in the sepulcher; but that He is risen from the dead, and glorified at the right hand of the majesty on high. This is quite true, but it only magnifies the value of the cross. If Jesus entered into heaven by His own blood, and now appears there a Lamb as it had been slain, do we not see the honor God has put upon the cross in heaven? It is Jesus risen and glorified that reflects such eternal value on His death. If we would be happy, if we would be heavenly-minded, we must dwell much on the glorious worth and work of the Lamb as it had been slain. The contemplation of the Lord Jesus in the glory, and His finished work, with a

believing regard to the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the written word concerning that work, fill the soul with joy and peace; for the word of Christ and the work are both needed for true spiritual joy. We must sit under His shadow, if we would have great delight.

4. THE BELIEVER'S EXERCISES.

His fruit was sweet to my taste (S of S 2:3).

The tree planted on Calvary is richly laden with sweetest fruit to the believing soul. There is nothing there to sour the spirit; but all is love, and peace, and blessing. All other springs are dry, but here there is continual refreshment. It needs but the hand of faith to pluck and eat the sweet fruit of the tree of life. Looking up to the Lord in the glory, we taste His goodness, and delight our souls in Him. Everything else has more or less of bitterness, but here we find nothing but sweetness. Here we feed on that grace which tells us of pardon, peace, acceptance, righteousness, sonship, and fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Here we see that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Here the fountain of living water is ever freely flowing; and we find that all the promises of God are made sure to us; for they are all yea and amen in Christ, unto the glory of God by us. Here the weary obtain renewal of strength, the disordered spirit finds healing, the mourner is comforted, faith becomes increased, and unbelief put to shame; the weak are strengthened, the erring are restored, the poor in spirit are enriched, the hungry are fed, and the thirsty refreshed. Oh, how blessed it is to sit beneath the outstretched arms of the Lamb as it had been slain, and, in the lively exercise of faith, eat of the precious fruit of His agony and death! All our exercises are profitable, if they lead us to Him; all our necessities are good, if they are only the occasions of our realizing our blessings in Christ, and of quickening our appetites to feeding on Him. There is all the difference between seeking satisfaction in the fruit of the Spirit in us, and feeding on Christ for us. The former engenders pride and bondage, the latter keeps us happy and fruitful.

5. THE BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGES.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love (S of S 2:4).

We are made nigh to God in Christ Jesus and by His blood, and our security is in the everlasting, unchangeable love of God. So exceedingly rich is the grace of God, that we cannot have one of the blessings of redemption without having all. So perfect in every way is the atoning work, that we are called unto the fellowship of the risen and glorified Son of God —

raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (see Eph. 2:6).

It is done —

He brought me to the banqueting house.

Hence we have liberty to draw near to God, to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. When Christ died on the cross, we are told that the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; thus showing us that every impediment to man's drawing near was removed, and that, through Christ's sacrifice, we may come with boldness to the throne of grace. The returned prodigal not only received the kiss of reconciliation, the best robe, the ring, shoes, &c.; but he was at once invited to feast at the father's table over the fatted calf, as having all the privileges of sonship —

let us eat and be merry (Luke 15:23).

So the Christian is not only reconciled, justified, and blessed, but is at once brought to the Father's bosom, loved with the same love as the Father hath loved Christ; for Jesus died to bring us to God. He undertook to raise us up at the last day, to present His Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. He is our life; He hath quickened us, given us the Spirit of adoption, and His blood gives us a sure title to glory; hence, through Him, we have access by the Spirit unto the Father. We are brought to the banqueting house, and His banner over us is love.

This is the ground of true worship. We no longer know Jerusalem, or any other place, where men ought to worship; for

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Where Jesus is, in the heavenlies, is the banqueting house — the house of bread and wine; the blood of Jesus is the way, the Spirit is the power, a believing and true heart the necessary state, the holiest of all the place. This is worship.

Here it is also that we learn the ways and mind of God. By the teaching of His Spirit, through the written word, our minds become stored with His thoughts, our hearts filled with His love; so that we think as He thinks, hate what He hates, love what He loves; according to our measure walk as Jesus walked, speak His words, &c. This is fellowship; this is the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Here we find the Lamb as it had been slain, ever reminding us of an already accomplished redemption, and of our perfect acceptance in Him. No obedience of ours could effect this; no legal service or carnal ordinances could possibly bring us into such nearness and blessing; but we are brought to the house of bread and wine by the blood of the Lamb. There we feast our souls. There we drink the cup of blessing. There we realize that His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed. There the various attributes of the God of love and peace shine forth in the slain Lamb with unfading beauty and eternal brightness. The joy of that banqueting house is that the dead son is alive again, and the lost found; the Shepherd's joy is, that He has found the sheep which was lost; and we rejoice that we are delivered from the swine- trough of sin and misery, and welcomed to feasting and joy in the Father's house. Happy would it be if we all more fully enjoyed the blessed privileges into which the grace of God has brought us.

Dear reader, have you seen beauty in Jesus? Has the death of Christ a claim on your heart above everything else? Are you seeking wealth, pleasure, science, fame? or are you so convinced of the unsatisfying character of all other things that you seek Jesus for present and eternal rest and peace? Do think of these things. You may perhaps say, I seek money, pleasure, science, fame, and Christ too; but let me tell you, that you cannot have this. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot be a friend of the world without being the enemy of God. You cannot love sin and love Christ too. You cannot please yourself and please God also. You cannot be an infidel and a believer at the same time. Let Me beseech you to discontinue the attempt to reconcile such impossibilities; let me entreat you to behold the love of God set forth so fully in the death of His beloved Son. Oh, look at that tree on which Jesus bare our sins in His own body! There tarry till your hard heart is melted,

till your icy affections are dissolved, till your unbelieving soul is overcome with such amazing love. Then you will love Jesus, delight in His ways and service, and the sincere language of your heart will be,

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love (S of S 2:3, 4).

May God graciously apply His own truth, by His Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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