Song of Solomon - Commentaries by Henry Allan Ironside

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, April 19

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“We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts; what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall he spoken for?”—
Song of Solomon 8:8.

THE more we enjoy of Christ ourselves, the more we will be concerned about underprivileged ones all about us, and in the regions beyond, who should know of the same blessed Saviour who means so much to us. Oh, these little sisters of ours, and brothers too, who are still sitting in darkness, waiting for the light to reach them! How can we be indifferent to their need? Our Lord has bidden us carry the glad gospel story into all the world, that millions more may share with us the joy of knowing that love which is beyond all telling. These lost sheep in the wilderness need to be sought after and brought to the Good Shepherd who died for them as well as for us.

Daily Sacrifice, April 17

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? — Song of Solomon 8:5.

THROUGHOUT the Christian centuries spiritually-minded believers have discerned in the Bridegroom and the Bride of the Canticles, pictures of Christ and His Church. Here the Bride is seen coming up out of the wilderness leaning in loving confidence on the mighty arm of her Beloved. It is a delightful illustration of the dependence of the Church upon her risen, glorified Lord.

—M. E. Rae.

Proverbs and Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 8:8-14

“What shall we do for our sister?” (Song of Solomon 8:8).

THIS question was put by the bride to the bridegroom after she had been brought into the full enjoyment of the privileges that he delighted to lavish upon her. lie had found her a shepherdess there in the hill country, and loved her and won her heart in those trying days when she felt herself so despised and neglected. Brought to the palace and united in marriage to the king, enjoying to the full his tender consideration and surrounded by the evidences of his affection, she could not keep from thinking of the little mountain home from which she had come.

She thought of the dear old mother who had raised her and cared for her after the father’s death, for it is evident that the mother was a widow, and the family by superintending the king’s vineyard earned a precarious living; and then she thought of the little sister, much younger than she, who had none of the privileges that she was enjoying. And as she thought of her, she seemed to say, “This bridegroom of mine, my king, the one who has loved me and brought me into these privileges, cannot but take an interest in my family, in my household, and I am going to speak to him about that sister of mine.” And so she turned to him in the tenderest, most confiding way, and said, “I have a little sister, a little undeveloped sister, up there in the vineyard. I am concerned about her. Is there not something we could do for her? What shall we do for our sister?” And he responds at once, “If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” You see, this is just the oriental way of saying, “I am so glad you spoke to me about that little sister of yours; I am so glad that you have not forgotten her and her needs. It will be a real privilege for me to show my love for you by what I do for her.” And so he uses the striking figures of the wall and the door as he asserts his willingness to help. It was as though he said, “Whatever her circumstances are, and whatever her needs are, I will be delighted to minister to them and I will make you my agent in doing it.”

It seems to me this expresses one of the very first evidences of union with Christ. We are no sooner saved ourselves, no sooner rejoicing in the knowledge of Christ as our Redeemer, as the Lover of our souls, as our heavenly Bridegroom, than we begin to think of others less privileged, and our hearts cry out with longing, “What about my little sister? What about my brother? What about those who are still in their sins and still in their deep, deep need, who do not know, do not understand this incomprehensible love of Thine which means so much to me?” And it is the Holy Spirit Himself who puts that yearning into our hearts that leads us to manifest an interest in the souls of others. In other words, every real Christian feels within him something that impels him to missionary service.

Are you saved yourself? Then have you been to the Lord about that little sister, or about that neglected brother? Perhaps it is a little sister or a brother you have never seen, and maybe, strange to say, of an altogether different color from yours! Perhaps that little sister of yours is away yonder, a child-widow in India, perhaps a down-trodden native woman in Central Africa, or a degraded Indian in the wilds of South America, but yet your little sister; for we read, “God hath made of one blood all nations that be upon the face of the earth.” And while you may say, “But she is so sinful, so undeserving,” you must remember that you too were sinful and undeserving and the grace that is lavished upon you came from His heart of love. He delights to give to the undeserving, and the very need of that little sister of yours is the reason why you should be going to the Lord about her.

The bride here is really praying about her sister. Do you often go to the blessed Lord in prayer for that little sister of yours? Perhaps it is a brother. My brother, you who rejoice in Christ Jesus, do you think very often of that poor, ignorant, under-privileged, degraded, sinful brother

of yours, living perhaps in heathen darkness today, or dwelling in the slums of one of our great cities, or, it may be, enjoying all that this life has to offer and yet not knowing Christ? Have you been to Him about that degraded one? Somebody has said, “A selfish Christian is a contradiction in terms,” and yet we do hear people talking about selfish Christians. Christianity is the manifestation in the life of the love of Christ, and that same love which was lavished upon you He would now have you lavish upon others in their need. What wonderful pictures we have along this line!

In the beginning of John’s Gospel we read how the Lord revealed Himself to one and another, and everyone who got that divine revelation went after someone else. Each said, “I have a brother, a friend, a dear one in need, and I must go to that one and tell the story of Jesus; tell him that we have found Him.” The privileges, the blessings that God has given to us in Christ are not given to us for ourselves alone. We may say in connection with them all: You must either use them or lose them. “What,” you say, “are you telling us that we may lose our souls after having been truly converted?” That is not a blessing. Your soul is you. Of course you cannot lose that if it is saved. I recognize the fact that having life eternal, you shall never perish, but I am talking about the blessings that the Lord lavishes upon you from day to day. They are in order that you may share them with others. To what extent do you enter into that?

I would have you think of three things. First, to what extent do you use your time for the blessing of other people? When I find Christians who need so much physical recreation and have so little time to seek to win souls, I do not quite understand it. I was speaking with a young man some months ago, and I said, “Do you do anything to win others for Christ?” He said, “I would like to, but it doesn’t seem to be my gift. I work hard all day, and when Saturday comes I have to go off and get some physical exercise.” I think his great invigorating exercise was throwing horseshoes at a little stick. I said, “Did it ever strike you that you could get wonderful exercise by taking a bundle of tracts and going out on a country road and visiting the homes along the way, telling people about their souls? Walking is wonderful exercise.”

“But,” he said, “you see, I am thinking of serious things all week, and I cannot be serious on Saturday afternoon.” Time is given us to use in view of eternity. I quite recognize that we need a certain amount of physical exercise or we would go to pieces, but you will find you can get on beautifully if you give more of your time to God. I was saved forty-one years ago, and I can honestly say my best times ever since have been those in which I have spent my days trying to help other people to a knowledge of Christ, and it is the greatest exercise in the world. I was visiting a preacher some time ago, and he asked, “What do you do for physical exercise?” I replied, “I preach.” “But I mean when you want to get a rest,” he said. “I preach some more and that rests me,” I answered; “the more you do in the work of the Lord, the better you feel.” “Brother,” he said, “you will have a nervous breakdown if you are not careful.” “But I am trying to be careful,” I said. It isn’t the Lord’s work that gives people nervous breakdowns, it is getting into debt, getting mixed up in questionable things, and then you get worried and upset. Just keep at solid service for the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will not have a nervous breakdown. Paul was at it for thirty years. They tried to kill him again and again; he was half-drowned several times, and was thrown to wild beasts, but the old man, when about seventy years of age, had much more vigor than a lot of worldly preachers that I meet, who have to go on a prolonged vacation every once in a while. Your time belongs to the Lord Jesus, and He gives it to you in order that you may use it to bless and help other folk. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

Some time ago, I knew a dear man, one of the greatest men for physical exercise I ever saw. He worked hard on the street railroad. I would see him down on his knees, a great big covering over his eyes to shield them from the brilliant light, as he welded the steel rails. By Saturday noon, he was just worn out, and he would get a bundle of books and off he would go for exercise, over the hills and far away, hunting up poor needy souls, maybe in the County Hospital, possibly in the jails, and to poor families. Sometimes he would hear of somebody lying sick and poor and miserable, and he would go to see that one. And you know he had a remarkable way of preaching the Gospel. He would often lay down a five-dollar bill at the side of the bed, if he found out that they had no money to pay the bills. On Sunday he would say, “My! I was worn out yesterday, but I had a wonderful time Saturday afternoon, and I am all rested up.” He was living for others.

and then you will find the secret of a really happy Christian life. Your time is to be spent in the service of Christ for the blessing of others, for the blessing of the little sister, of that poor brother.

And then there is something else. He has entrusted you with your talents. “Oh, but,” you say, “I haven’t any.” Oh, yes; you have. You would not like it if others said you had none. But who are you using them for? For Christ, for the blessing of that brother, of that sister in need? It is the investment that you make of your talents here for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ that is going to bring you a reward at His judgment-seat. You remember what He said, “Unto every one that hath shall be given...but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

You are to use the talents God has given you for Jesus’ sake. Is it the ability to speak? Use it for winning souls to Christ. Is it that you know how to be a kindly sympathetic friend? Then surely you have a wonderful sphere for service. Is it looking up the shut-ins, the sick and needy, and giving them a tender loving word? You would bless and help so many you never think of now, if you would only begin to use those talents for Him. It is not all the work of the man on the platform. I never see souls coming to Christ in a meeting but I wonder what started them. Years ago, when I was young and ignorant, I would go home to my wife and say, “I won six souls tonight,” and she would look at me and say, “Are you sure you did it?” I would say, “No,” of course, “but the Lord used me.” But you know it really began away back of that. Perhaps it was a dear Sunday School teacher who had been sowing the seed in the heart of that young man or woman. It was lying there dormant for days, months, or years, and as the Word of God came anew, something was said that just caused it to fructify and burst into life, and that boy or girl came to Jesus.

Perhaps it was the lesson the mother taught as the child knelt at her knee long ago. Perhaps it was the father’s word dropped into the heart. There is seldom a soul who comes to Christ but there were a lot of folk who had to do with it. It is not just the preacher and the preached message. God give us to use our talents for Christ. Paul planted, Apollos watered, “but God gave the increase.”

Then there is my privilege not only to use my time and my talents but my money, to help and bless that little sister, that neglected brother. What a wonderful thing consecrated money is! There never would have been a dollar bill, a piece of silver money, a gold, copper or nickel coin in the world, if it had not been for sin. That is why Jesus calls it the mammon of unrighteousness. Every coin in your pocket is a witness that sin has come into the world. If men and women had remained as they were when God created them, there would have been no money. People would not have sought to build up fortunes, and buy and sell things. We would still be living in a glorious state on this earth, and we would not have had to go out and earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. And now Jesus says, “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon

of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). Since the money is here, and we cannot get along without it, do not live for it; do not let it get a hold on you ("The love of money is the root of all evil"), but use it now in reference to the everlasting habitations; use it to meet, of course, your own needs and those of your family, but then use it as God enables you, to bless and help others in their deep spiritual need and in their temporal need too. Then, by-and-by, when at last you reach the glorious habitation, you will see a throng running down the golden street to meet you, and they will say, "Welcome," and you will ask in amazement, "Who can these be?" And one will answer, "We are so glad to welcome you here, for it was your dollar that paid for that Testament that brought me the message of Christ." Another, "You met my need when in such distress I thought nobody cared for me, and then you gave me the money for a good dinner, and I could not help but think of the God of all grace who had put it in your heart to do that for me"; and another, "I came to Jesus because of the kind deed you did for me." Then we will feel it was worthwhile that we spent and were spent for others. "What shall be done for our little sister?" Let us share with her the good things we have.

The king says, "If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver." A wall speaks of security. If she has already entered into the blessings of Christ, we will build upon her a silver palace. We will add to that which is already hers. We will try to help and lead her on and build her up in the things which be in Christ. "If she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." A door speaks of responsibility, or opportunity for service. "A great door," says the apostle, "and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Rev. 3:8). But what use is a door if it has no side-posts to swing from? "If she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." If she wants an opportunity for service, we will help to make it possible, and we will assist her in whatever is required, that she may work the better for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then as the chapter closes and the little book closes, the bride, her heart content to think she has come into blessing and that her little sister too has come into blessing, goes over the past, and talks about the vineyard days, the love that has been shown and the bliss now hers, and then she turns to her beloved one and says, "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." "Till the day break and the shadows flee away." The consummation of all bliss will be when we are at home forever with Him. Till then, let us seek to spend and be spent for His glory.

You have heard of the missionary offering that was being taken, and as the box was handed to a very wealthy man, he brushed it to one side and said, "I do not believe in missions." "Then," said the usher, "take something out; this is for the heathen." How can you be a rear Christian and not be concerned about those who are less privileged than you are? God stir our hearts to think of the millions still in their great, great need. If we can do nothing else for them, we can bring their case to Him; we can be prayer-helpers; we can intercede on their behalf. The wonderful thing is that when you begin to pray, the rest follows. Men who pray devise ways and means for giving. A lady said to me one time, "You know my husband is unsaved, and he never lets me have any money. He says he wouldn't for the world give me a dime to put in the missionary offering. But I started praying about missions, and as I prayed, there came such a burden on my heart to do something. I had two or three chickens that I had bought with a little money I received from doing some sewing for a neighbor. It was all mine, and I said, 'I am going to devote one chicken to the Lord, and every egg that this chicken lays will belong to Him.' It has been wonderful to me to see that the other chickens lay every once in a while, but my husband growls and says, 'That missionary chicken of yours lays nearly two eggs a day.' Of course that is an exaggeration, but every little while I have another dozen eggs, and I take them to the corner store and get my money, and that goes for missions." I believe that the Lord will take that money and do with it what He did with the five loaves and two fishes: multiply, and multiply, and multiply them. Maybe one way in which He will multiply it will be to start some of you giving, and then, you see, the Lord will turn to this lady and say, "You are the woman that had that chicken the preacher told about. I am going to give you a part of the reward, for these folk just copied from you!"

Let us seek by grace to make every day count for the blessing of others. Loving Him truly we cannot be selfish or indifferent to the needs of those for whom He died, "until the day break and the shadows flee away."

Proverbs and Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 8:6-7

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned" (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7).

IT is, of course, the love of the bridegroom for his bride that is thus spoken of. We have been tracing the manifestations of it throughout this little book, from the time when the shepherd first looked upon the shepherdess and his heart went out to her until the time when they were united in marriage. It is a beautiful picture, first of the love of Christ reaching us in our deep, deep need, and then that glorious union with Him which will be consummated at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Now you hear the bride exclaiming, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm." The seal speaks of something that is settled. One draws up a legal document and seals it and that settles it. And so Christ and His loved ones have entered into an eternal relationship, and He has given us the seal, the Holy Spirit. "Upon believing, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." This is "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." That seal is the pledge of His love, and you will notice that in the words that follow we have love spoken of in four ways, at least we have four characteristics of love.

First, there is the strength of love. "Love is strong as death." Second, the jealousy of love. In our Version we read, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave," and of course that is often true of human love. It may be a very cruel thing indeed, but actually the word translated "cruel" is the ordinary Hebrew word for "firm" or "unyielding." It may be translated, "Jealousy is unyielding as the grave." "The coals thereof are coals of fire, a vehement flame," and this expression, "a vehement flame," in the Hebrew text is "a flame of Jah." That is the first part of the name of Jehovah and it is one of the titles of God. In the third place we have the endurance of love. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." And then lastly, the value of love. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned."

First let us meditate on the strength of love; and we are thinking, of course, of the love of our God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, for Christ is the Bridegroom of our souls. “Love is strong as death.” This He has already demonstrated. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.” And that giving Himself meant going into death to redeem His own. “Love is strong as death.” We might even say in His case, “It is stronger than death,” for death could not quench His love. He went down into death and came up in triumph that He might make us His own, and it is of this we are reminded as we gather at the Lord’s table. It is this which He wishes us to cherish in a special way when we come together to remember Him. He knows how apt we are to forget; He knows how easy it is to be occupied with the ordinary things of life, and even with the work of the Lord, and forget for the moment the price He paid for our redemption; and He would call us back from time to time to sit together in sweetest and most solemn fellowship, and meditate on that mighty love of His which is “strong as death.” Nothing could turn Him aside.

Because there was no other way to redeem our souls, “He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” When He went through that Samaritan village, they did not receive Him because they realized that there was no desire upon His part to remain among them at that time, but they saw “His face as though He would go to Jerusalem,” and they said as it were, “Well, if He prefers to go to Jerusalem rather than remain here with us, we are not going to pay attention to His message. We are not interested in the proclamation that He brings.” How little they understood that it was for them, as truly as for the Jews in yonder Judea, that He “set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.” If He had not gone to Jerusalem and given Himself up to the death of the Cross, there could be no salvation for Samaritan, Jew, or Gentile. But oh, the strength of His love! He allowed nothing to divert Him from that purpose for which He had come from heaven. Before He left the glory, He said, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7). And to do the will of God meant for Him laying down His life on the cross for our redemption. Do we think of it as much as we should? Do we give ourselves to meditation, to dwelling on the love of Christ, a love that passeth knowledge, and do we often say to ourselves, “The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me”? Oh, the strength of His love!

Then we think of the jealousy of love. I know that jealousy in these poor hearts of ours is often a most contemptible and despicable thing. Jealousy on our part generally means utter selfishness. We are so completely selfish, we do not like to share our friends with any one else; and what untold sorrow has come into many a home because of the unreasonable jealousy of a husband, of a wife, of parents, or of children. But while we deprecate a jealousy which has selfishness and sin at the root of it, there is another jealousy which is absolutely pure and holy, and even on our lower plane someone has well said that, “Love is only genuine as long as it is jealous.” When the husband reaches the place where he says, “I do not care how my wife bestows her favors on others; I do not care how much she runs around with other men; I am so large-hearted I can share her with everybody,” that husband does not love his wife, and if you could imagine a wife talking like that about her husband, you would know that love was gone, that it was dead.

Love cannot but be jealous, but let us see that it is a jealousy that is free from mere selfishness and unwarranted suspicion. When we think of it in connection with God we remember that one of the first things we learned to recite was the Ten Commandments, and some of us were perplexed when we read, “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me.” We shrank back from that because we were so used to thinking of jealousy as a despicable human passion, that we could not think of God having it in His character. But it is He who has a right to be jealous. God’s jealousy is as pure as is His love, and it is because He loves us so tenderly that He is jealous. In what sense is He jealous? Knowing that our souls’ happiness and blessing alone will be found in walking in fellowship with Himself, He loves us so much He does not want to see us turning away from the enjoyment of His love and trying to find satisfaction in any lesser affection, which can only be for harm and eventual ruin. “The end of these things is death.”

Paul writing to the Corinthian church says, “I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ.” And then he gives the ground of his jealousy. “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” You see Paul was a true pastor. He loved the people of Christ’s flock and knew that their only lasting joy was to be found in living in communion with their Saviour; and His heart was torn with a holy jealousy if he saw them turning aside to the things of the world, following after the things of the flesh, or being ensnared by the devil. Every God-anointed pastor will feel that way.

Young believers sometimes imagine that some of us who try to lead the flock of God are often needlessly hard and severe, and they think us unsympathetic and lacking in compassion and tenderness when we earnestly warn them of the folly of worldliness and carnality. They say, “Oh, they don’t understand. That old fogy preacher, I have no doubt, had his fling when he was young, and now he is old and these things no longer interest him, and so he wants to keep us from having a good time!”

Let me “speak as a fool,” and yet I trust to the glory of God. As a young believer coming to Christ when I was fourteen years old, the first lesson I had to learn was that there is nothing in this poor world to satisfy the heart, and by the grace of God I sought to give it all up for Jesus’ sake. The only regret I have today is that there have ever been times in my life when I have drifted into carnality and fallen into a low backslidden state, and so allowed myself something which afterward left a bad conscience and a sense of broken fellowship, and I never was happy until it was judged, and I was once more in communion with the Lord. If sometimes we speak strongly to you about going in the ways of the world, reminding you that God has said, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing,” it is because we have learned by years of experience that there is no peace, there is no lasting joy, there is no true unspoiled happiness for those who walk in the ways of the world. If you want a life of gladness, a life of enduring bliss; if you want to be able to lie down at last and face death with a glad, free spirit, then we beg of you, follow the path that your blessed Lord Jesus took. Oh that we might not be turned aside but that we might rouse our souls to a godly jealousy.

I wonder if you have ever noticed that the blessed Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer is Himself spoken of as jealous. There is a passage found in James 4:4, 5, that I am afraid is not often really understood, because of the way it is translated in our Version, but it is a very striking one: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” Take that home, dear young Christian. Do not be seduced by the world and its folly; do not be turned aside from the path of faithfulness to Christ by the mad rush for worldly pleasure and amusement; do not allow the flesh to turn you away and rob you of what should be your chief joy. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” It is the next verse that perhaps we might not understand. “Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” One might gather that this expression, “The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy,” was a quotation from Scripture, as though He were asking, “Do

you think the Scripture, that is, the Old Testament, saith in vain, 'The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?'" But you can search the Old Testament from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Malachi, and you will not find those words or anything that sounds like them. So it is clear that that is not what is meant. In fact, there are really two distinct questions in the Greek. First there is the question, "Do ye think that the Scripture speaketh in vain?" Do you? Do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain? Having read its warnings and its admonitions against worldliness, against the unequal yoke, against the pleasures of sin, against following the path of the flesh, do you sometimes say in your heart, "I know it is all in the Bible, but after all, I am not going to take it too seriously?" Do you think that the Scripture speaketh in vain?

Why has God put these things in His Word? Is it because He does not love you, and desires to keep you from things that would do you good? That is what the devil told Eve in the beginning. He insinuated that God did not Love her. He said, "God doth know that in the lay ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). And Eve said, "I am going to eat of it; I will try anything once." Is that what you have been saying too? If you can only do this or do that, you think you will have an experience you have never had before. The whole world is looking for new thrills today. Before you act, put the question to yourself, "Does the Scripture speak in vain?" It tells you that the end of all these things is death and you may be assured the Scripture does not speak in vain.

Then there is a second question, "Doth the Spirit that dwelleth in us jealously desire?" And the answer is, "Yes." The Holy Ghost dwelling in the believer jealously desires to keep us away from the world and to keep our hearts true to Christ. Do you realize that you never tried to go into anything that dishonored the Lord, you never took a step to go into the world, but the Spirit of God within you was grieved, and sought to exercise you because He jealously desired to keep you faithful to Christ? I am talking to Christians. If you are not a Christian, the Spirit does not dwell in you, and you do not know what this is.

Our blessed Lord wants you all for Himself. People say sometimes, "Well, I want to give the Lord the first place in my heart," and they mean that there will be a lot of places for other things. The Lord does not merely want the first place; He wants the whole place; He wants to control your whole heart, and when He has the entire control, everything you do will be done for His glory.

A striking little incident is told by Pastor Dolman. Before the world war he was in Russia holding some meetings in the palace of one of the Russian nobility. Among those who attended the meetings was a Grand Duchess. She was a sincere evangelical Christian. Dr. Dolman was talking one day about a life devoted to Christ, about separation and unworldliness, and when he finished, the Grand Duchess stepped forward and said, "I do not agree with everything Pastor Dolman said."

"What did I say with which you do not agree, Your Imperial Highness?" asked Dr. Dolman.

"You said it is wrong to go to the theater. I go to the theater, but I never go without first getting down on my knees and asking Him to go with me, and He does."

Pastor Dolman said, "But, Your Imperial Highness, I did not say a word about the theater."

"I know; but you meant that."

"Your Imperial Highness," said Dr. Dolman, "are you not turning things around? Who gave you or me authority to decide where we will go or what we will do, and then to ask the Lord to be with us in it? Instead of getting down on your knees and saying, 'Lord, I am going to the theater, come with me,' why don't you wait until He comes to you and says, 'Grand Duchess, I am going to the theater, and I want you to go with Me?'"

She threw up her hands and was honest enough to say, "Pastor Dolman, you have spoiled the theater for me. I cannot go again."

"Where He leads me, I will follow," but don't you start and ask Him to tag along. Let Him lead. Because He knows that your real, lasting happiness and joy are bound up in devotion to Him, He is jealous lest you should be turned aside.

Now we notice the endurance of love. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." How precious that is! How blessedly it was proven in His case. He went down beneath the floods of divine judgment. He could say, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me" (Ps. 42:7). But it did not quench His love, and through all the years since His people have had to endure many things; they have had to pass through deep waters, to go through great trials, but He has been with them through it all. "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them" (Isa. 63:9). In Isaiah 43:2 we read, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Don't you love to have somebody to whom you can go with all your troubles and know He will never get tired of you?

Some years ago I became acquainted with a poor little old lady in a place where I was ministering the Word. She was going through all kinds of sorrow, and she came to me and said, "I would just like to tell you about my troubles." I felt like saying, "Dear sister, I wish you would tell them to the Lord." But I sat down and listened, and now for over ten years I have been getting her troubles by mail, and I try to send her a little encouraging and sympathetic word in reply. Recently I met her again and she said, "You must be getting awfully tired of my troubles," and if I had told the truth, I would have had to say, "Yes, I am," but I said, "What is troubling you now?" "Oh," she said, "it is not anything new, but it is such a comfort to find somebody who will enter into them and understand!" And she was so effusive in her gratitude I was ashamed that I had not entered into things more deeply.

Ah, we have a great High Priest who never wearies of our trials. We weary of hearing of them sometimes because they stir our hearts and we would like to do that which we cannot do; but He has power to see us through. No trial, no distress, can quench His love. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). Somebody has translated it this way, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them all the way through." Through what? Through everything. He even loved Peter through his denial, through his cursing and swearing, and loved him back into fellowship with Himself. His love is unfailing. Having taken us up in grace, He loves to the end.

Let us look now at the value of love. Can you purchase love? Can you pay for it? I was in a home at one time where a very rich man of seventy years of age, worth millions, had married a girl of eighteen. Her ambitious, worldly-minded mother had engineered the marriage. I could not

help noticing that young wife off in a corner sobbing to herself and crying bitterly, but I tried never to interfere, for I did not want her to tell me what was in her heart. But one day the husband said, “Do you notice how downhearted my wife is?” I said, “She must have had some great sorrow.”

“I am her sorrow,” he said. “She was a poor girl, very beautiful and talented, and, as you know, I have been very successful, and I just thought that I could give her every comfort and could surely make her love me. I know that we do not seem to be suited; she is so much younger than I. But she can have everything, all the beautiful clothes and jewels she wants, and surely any girl ought to be happy in a home like this. But, you know, it is all in vain; I cannot seem to buy her love.”

Of course not. He ought to have known that he did not have that in his heart to which she could respond. They belonged to two different ages, as it were. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” You cannot buy love, but oh, His love to us creates love in us. It is not the wonderful things that He has done for us, it is not the fact that He has enriched us for eternity, but it is because of what He is. “We love Him because He first loved us.”

What a blessed thing to know Him and love Him and be loved by Him! Oh, to be kept from wounding such a Lover, from grieving His Holy Spirit! For we read, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.”

Proverbs and Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 5:2-8:5

“I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love” (Song of Solomon 5:2-8).

WE have a very long section before us beginning with the second verse of chapter five and concluding with the fifth verse of chapter eight. In this entire portion we have traced out for us in a very wonderful way the interruption of communion and its final restoration. We have already had one similar picture in this book where the bridegroom’s absence produced a temporary sense of estrangement. We have that dealt with more fully in this section, where the bridegroom’s advances are coldly spurned. If we will remember that the bride speaks of any regenerated soul and that the bridegroom is our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, I am sure we shall have no difficulty in getting the spiritual lesson of these chapters.

We have all experienced interrupted communion. We have all known such periods of glad joy in the Lord as those brought before us in the previous chapter. But how often have we found that, following almost immediately on a period of great blessing and delightful fellowship with the Lord, there may come a time of spiritual dearth and broken fellowship. You recall that in Israel’s history they were scarcely through rejoicing over the wonderful victory at Jericho before they were wringing their hands in despair because of the defeat at Ai. How often in our Christian lives we have similar experiences. Perhaps you go to an edifying meeting where your whole soul is stirred by the singing, by the prayers, and by the ministry of the Word, and you feel as though you would never again lose sight of your blessed Redeemer’s face; and yet the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, and within a very short time you find yourself inquiring, “Where is the blessedness I knew When first I saw the Lord?”

And everything seems dark and cloudy and you no longer discern your Saviour’s presence. Is there anyone who has had uninterrupted communion with the Lord throughout all the years? I am sure there is not. Even if we imagined so, it would simply be because we lacked that sensitiveness which would enable us to apprehend the fact that He was in some sense grieved because of our behavior.

We have a wonderfully beautiful picture here. The bride has retired and she is drowsing, just about asleep, and yet a bit restless, when there comes a knock at the door. It is the knock of the beloved one who has returned from a distant journey and he cries, “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.” We have the same picture in the New Testament in the third chapter of the book of Revelation, in which we see the Lord Jesus waiting outside the door of the Laodicean church. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” But what lethargy there is! How few respond to His gracious request! And so here the bride exclaims, “I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” There is a fretfulness about it. Why am I disturbed at this hour? Why did you not come at some other time? I have taken off my coat; why should I put it on now? I have washed my feet; why should I defile them? This refers to the eastern custom of washing the feet before seeking repose, for in that land they wore sandals and the upper part of the foot had no covering. In other words, she did not want to bestir herself even so much as to open the door to him. Have you never known similar experiences?

Have you never been so much concerned with your own affairs, with seeking your own ease, with self-pleasing, that when His voice called you for an hour of communion and fellowship with Him, you really repelled His advances, instead of gladly throwing open the door and saying, “Blessed Lord, nothing else is worthwhile but to enjoy the sunshine of Thy smile, to enjoy fellowship with Thyself?”

In this instance, we may see in the bride’s behavior evidence of just such a state of soul. But then, as she lies there drowsing, neither actually asleep nor awake, she discerns something that moves her heart. She says, “My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door.” We will not understand the simile unless we are familiar with those eastern doors and locks. The lock was on the inside of the door, and there was an opening where the owner could, if he had the key, reach in and use the key from the inside to open the door. He comes, but he does not open the door in that way. He has asked admission and wants her to rise and open for him. She sees that hand come through the opening and the moment she does so, her heart is stirred and she cries, “Oh, I must let him in.” And now she rises and hurries to the door and even as she lays hold of the lock, she exclaims, “My hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.” That

refers to another eastern custom. When a lover came to visit the one who had won his heart and found that she was not at home, or if at home, she did not respond to his advances, he covered the lock of the door with sweet-smelling ointments and left flowers as a token of his affection. And so the bride says, “My hands dropped with myrrh, and my lingers with sweet-smelling myrrh.” It was not a dream then; he had really been there and had gone. But she threw the door open to enable him to hear her cry, “Come, come in!” but there was no answering response. “My beloved,” she said, “had withdrawn himself and was gone.”

Love is very sensitive. The trouble with many of us is that we fail to recognize this. We have an idea that the beloved one should be ready whenever we are for a time of gladness together, but it is not always so. And so, sometimes when He comes to the heart’s door we practically say, “No; it is inconvenient. I do not want to drop things right now.” But later when we would enjoy His presence we find He has gone. Have you never had such experiences? Has He come to you and said, “I want you to sit down with Me over My Word; I want you to spend a little time in prayer; to dismiss other things from your mind and commune with Me,” and you have said, “Oh, but I have so much to occupy me; I cannot do it now.” Plenty of time for self but very little for Him. And then some wonderful token of His loving-kindness came to you, and you said, “Oh, I must respond to His heart,” and you threw open the door as it were and called, but He was not there. And did you ever know what it was to go on for days and weeks without any real sense of His presence? “My beloved had withdrawn himself.” If you do not respond to His voice when He comes to you in tender grace, you may seek Him for a long time before you will enjoy fellowship with Him again. Such is the sensitiveness of love. He wants to make you feel that His love is worthwhile, and wants to test you as to whether you are really in earnest when you profess to desire fellowship with Him.

And so as the story goes on, she leaves the house and goes out into the city seeking after him, and as she makes her way from street to street, perchance calling his name and looking here and there and wondering where he has hidden himself, she says, “The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.” You will always have to suffer if you refuse obedience to the voice of Christ when He calls you. You will always have to be tested before communion is restored.

There is a word in the New Testament that has troubled some of our sisters. In 1 Corinthians 11 we are told that a Christian woman, when she is engaged in worship with the people of God or in public prayer or testimony, is to cover her head with a veil. And people say, “Why the veil?” The Bible says that the veil is her “power.” Is not that a strange thing? In the margin of our Bible we have a rather peculiar interpretation of that. I think it must have been suggested by a man. It says, “Power, a sign that she is under the power of her husband.” But I do not think that is it, at all. This verse, I believe, explains what it means.

The covering on her head is her power. In what sense? Look at it this way. As long as her head was veiled that was her power, but when the keepers saw her going about the streets at night, they misunderstood her motive and character, and they took away her veil. The unveiled woman was marked out as one who was unclean and unchaste; but the covering on her head was the sign of the chaste and modest wife or maiden.

Years ago I was a Salvation Army officer. I remember that our Army girls could go anywhere with those little blue bonnets. I never knew but one in all the years I was connected with them, who was insulted by any one in any place as long as she had that little bonnet on. I have been seeking the lost in the lowest kind of dives on the Barbary Coast of San Francisco, and have seen them come in with their papers and go from one rough ungodly man to another, and ordinarily no one ever said an unkind or a wicked word to them. But once a drunken sailor dared to say something insulting to one of them, immediately practically the entire crowd jumped on him and knocked him down and gave him such a trouncing as he had never had before; and then threw him into the street for the police to pick up. The little blue bonnet was the power of the Salvation Army lassie. Just so the covered head of the women in that oriental land. The uncovered head bespoke the immoral woman, while the covered head was her power, and told that she was seeking to live a life of goodness and purity. So here, because the bride has lost the sense of her bridegroom’s presence, she is branded as though she were impure and unholy. This shame has come upon her because she did not immediately respond to her bridegroom’s call.

She turns for help to the daughters of Jerusalem as the morning dawns and she sees them coming down the street. “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.” In other words, Tell him my heart is yearning for him; tell him I repent of my indifference, of my cold-heartedness and my unconcern, and want him above everything else. Christian, is that what your heart says? Are you a backslidden believer? Do you remember times when you enjoyed communion with your Lord, when life with Him was sweet and precious indeed? But alas, alas, that fellowship has been broken, and you are saying with Job, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!” Does your heart say today, “Tell Him that I am sick of love, that my whole being is yearning after Him; I want to be restored to Him, to the sweetness of communion?” The daughters of Jerusalem say, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”

This one that you say means so much to you, why is he more to you than you might expect another to be to us? The world says, “Why is Christ more to you than any other?” Why does Jesus mean so much more to us than the things that you and I have known in the world? “Tell us that we may seek him with thee.” Then at once she begins to praise him and laud him. From verse ten to the end of the chapter in wonderful oriental imagery she praises his kindness, his graciousness, his aptness to help, his strength, and his tenderness. She cries, “My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand.” And when she thus praises him they turn again and say, “Where has he gone? How is it that you have let him slip out of your sight if he is so much to you?” Is that not a proper question? If Christ is so precious to you, if He means so much to you, why is it that you so easily allow fellowship to be broken? Why do you so readily permit other things to come in and hinder communion?

“Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.” And then instantly as she bears testimony to him, she recalls the last words he said to her before that eventful night, “I am come into my garden,” and her own heart was the garden, and she says, “I know where he is. My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.” And instantly he speaks; he is right there. He had been waiting and watching for her to come to the place where he was everything to her soul, and at once he exclaims, “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.” And then through all the rest of the chapter he praises her; he expresses his appreciation of her as she had expressed hers of him. In chapter seven, verses one to nine, he uses one beautiful figure after another to tell all his delight in her. It is a wonderful thing to know that the Lord has far more delight in His people than we ourselves have ever had in Him. Some day we shall enjoy Him to the fullest; some day He will be everything to us; but as long as we are here, we never appreciate Him as much as He appreciates us. But as she listens

to his expression of love, her heart is assured; she has the sense of restoration and fellowship. In verse ten she says, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” In other words, he has not turned against her. When we turn from Him, the natural thought of our hearts is that He has turned against us, but He has not. If He allows us to go through trial, it is like Joseph testing his brethren in order to see if there was genuine repentance of sin.

Three times in this little book we have similar expressions to this, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me.” In chapter two, verse sixteen, we read, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” That is very precious. Are you able to say, “My beloved is mine, and I am His?” In other words, Have you given yourself to Him? Have you trusted Him as your Saviour? If you have, He has given Himself to you. Just the very moment you give yourself to Him in faith, that moment He gives Himself to you and comes to dwell in your heart. This is the assurance, then, of salvation. “My beloved is mine, and I am His.” And then in chapter six, verse three, she says, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” That is communion. I belong to him and he belongs to me, that we may enjoy one another together. And then in verse ten of chapter seven, we read, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” Every doubt and every fear is gone. She has found her satisfaction in him and he finds his in her. What a wonderful picture! Shall it be only a picture, or is it to be a reality in our lives? Is it not a fact that so often we do the very things the Shulamite did? So often we turn a deaf ear to the Bridegroom’s voice. We can be so busy even with Christian work that we do not take time for Him. I can be so occupied with preaching that I do not have time for prayer. I can be so taken up with preparing sermons that I do not have time to feed on the Word. You may ask, “Why, how can you prepare sermons without feeding on the Word?” It is one thing to study the Bible in order to prepare an address which I am to give to other people, but it is another thing to sit down quietly in the presence of the Lord and say, “Blessed Saviour, as I open Thy Book I want to hear Thy voice speaking to my heart. I want Thee to talk to me, to express Thyself to me in tones of tender love.” As I read in that attitude, He speaks to my soul, and as I lift my heart to Him in prayer, I talk with Him. That is communion.

Do not be content with the knowledge of salvation; do not be content to know that your soul is eternally secure; do not be content to know that you are serving Him in some little measure. Remember, there is something that means more to Him than all your service, and that is to sit at His feet and delight your soul in His love. As you read this description in the sixth chapter it will remind you of the fullness there is in Christ. It seems as though every figure is exhausted to show His wonder.

Oh, to have the heart so occupied with Him that we shall lose sight of everything else, and Christ alone will satisfy every longing of our souls!

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, April 18

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” —Song of Solomon 4:12.

IT is a poor thing when the Lord does not have the first place in the heart. He is thoroughly exclusive. He wants the whole heart for Himself. When it is thus set apart for Him, He will keep the key and He will enter in and enjoy all the sweet flowers and fruit that His own Holy Spirit produces. When this is actually true there will be abundance for the blessing of others, for the living fountain will flow out beyond the walls of the garden to bring refreshment and blessing to a needy world outside. But the great thing is to be sure that He alone holds the key, and that His seal is upon the door which none else can break.

Proverbs and Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 4:12-5:1

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh, and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved” (Song of Solomon 4:12-15; 5:1).

WE have been noticing in chapter after chapter how the blessed Lord puts before us our privileges as those who are permitted to enter into communion with Himself, and now in this little section we have the believer (if you think of it as the individual), or Israel, or the Church, whichever you will, pictured as a watered garden set apart for our Lord Himself to bring forth fruit that will be to His delight. It is a lovely figure, one used on a number of other occasions in Scripture. In the fifty-eighth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, God pictures His people as such a garden. In verse eleven, He says, “The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.” This is a beautiful picture. Primarily it refers to Israel, and morally it speaks of any believer, of that which God would see in all His saints as they walk with Him. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter thirty-one, verse twelve, we read, “Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all.” It is the Risen Christ Himself from whom we draw abundant supplies of mercy and grace; but did you ever think of your own heart as a garden in which He is to find His joy? Your very life is as a garden which is to be for His pleasure. That is the figure you have here. It is the bridegroom looking upon his bride with his heart filled with delight as he says to her, “You are to be for me, you are like a lovely garden yielding its fruit and flowers for me, set apart for myself.”

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” We in America like open gardens that anybody can enjoy, but in Syria and in other parts of the old land, they have many enclosed gardens, gardens that are walled in. This is necessary in some of those countries, as otherwise they would be destroyed by marauding creatures and robbers. It is as though the Lord says, “That is what I want My people to be, separated to Myself; I want them to have about them the wall of holiness, for I have marked them off as My own.” In the Psalms we read, “The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself.” Some Christians shrink from the idea of separation. If it is only a legal thing, it may become mere Pharisaism with no heart to it, but if it is to Himself, if it is the soul going out to Him, if one turns away from the

world for love of Him, then separation is a very precious thing indeed, and one does not need to think of it as legal bondage, for it is being set apart for God Himself. Could one think of a higher privilege on earth than that He might find His joy in us and we might find our joy in Him?

“A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.” How Satan likes to break down the wall, to destroy that principle of holy separation which would keep our hearts for the Lord alone; but what a loss it is to our own souls, and what a loss it means to Him, when His people become like a garden trodden under foot, as it were, by every wayfarer. That is what the Christian becomes who does not keep the path of separation.

Then notice the next figure, “A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” Pure water is a very precious thing in the far East and so often, when a spring is discovered, it is walled about, covered, and locked, and the owner of it keeps the key so that he can go and drink when he will, and the water is kept from pollution and waste. That is what our Lord would have in His people. He has given His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and the Holy Spirit is Himself the Fountain of Water within every believer’s heart, that we might be to His praise and to His glory. This living water within the garden will, of course, result in abundant fruit and flowers.

“Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard.” The orchard suggests more than a mere garden of beautiful flowers; not only something fair to look at, or something that is fragrant to the senses, but something fruitful as well. What precious fruit is borne by the believer; what precious fruit is found in the heart of the one who is shut up to God! In Philippians one, the apostle tells those dear saints that he is sure that God who has begun the good work in them, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. In verses nine to eleven of this chapter, he says, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” It seems to me that every one ought to understand that a life that is lived for God is one bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Love, purity, goodness, sweetness, kindness, compassion, consideration for others, all of these things are the beautiful fruits that grow in this garden when the living water is properly fructifying the soil. In Galatians 5:22 we have a long list of the fruit of the Spirit. Challenge your own heart by asking, “Am I producing this kind of fruit for Him, ‘Love, joy, peace, longsuffering’?” It is that patience, you know, that makes you willing to endure. Then there is “gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” This is the delightful fruit that our Lord is looking for in the lives of His people. He would have every one of us as a garden that produces fruit like this.

That word translated “orchard” is really similar to the Persian word for “Paradise,” and it may suggest that as God has a paradise above for His own people, where they shall share His joy for all eternity, so a believer’s heart when it is producing fruit like this, is for God a paradise where He finds His joy and His delight. I wonder if we think enough of that side of it. Are we not likely to become self-centered and merely think of God as serving us, the blessed Lord Jesus giving Himself for us, dying for us, rising again for us, nurturing our souls, guiding us through the wilderness of this world and bringing us at last to glory? Some of the hymns we sing are almost entirely occupied with the blessings that come to us, but these do not rise to the height of the Christian’s communion at all. It is when we are through thinking about what God is doing for us, and are seeking by grace to adore the One who does all this for us, and are letting our lives go out to Him as a thank-offering in praise and adoration, that we truly rise to the height of our Christian privileges. Then it is that He gathers these sweet and lovely fruits in His garden. It is not only fruit upon which He feeds, but it is that which gives satisfaction in every sense. “Camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.” Some of these plants give forth their fragrance as the rain and dew fall upon them; some of them send forth a subtle aroma when the rays of the sun are warming them. Others never exude, never give out their fragrance, until they are pierced and the sap flows forth. So is it with our lives. We need all kinds of varied experiences in order that we may manifest the graces of Christ in our behavior, and it is not only that we are to be for His delight in the sense in which I have been speaking, but we are to be for His service too, in making known His grace to a lost world.

In the next verse we read, “A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.” Let us see if we can correlate that. There is Lebanon, that backbone mountain range of Palestine, with Mt. Hermon to the north covered with snow. The streams coming down from Lebanon sink into the ground, and as they do so, springs rise here and there in vales and dells to the surface of the earth, and so the living water flows forth to refresh the thirsty soil. The living water represents, as we know from John’s Gospel, the blessed Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

Now the Spirit of God descending from above enters into our inmost being and then we have the living water springing up unto everlasting life. Our own hearts are refreshed and gladdened, and the living water in abundance flows out from us for the blessing of a lost world around. Is this not a beautiful picture? My brother, my sister, what do you know of this life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Far too many of us seem to be content to know that our sins have been forgiven, that we have a hope of heaven based upon some testimony that we have received from Holy Scripture. But it is more than this. We are not merely to have the assurance of our own salvation, but every one of us should be as watered gardens for Him, with streams flowing out for the refreshment of dying men and women all about us.

In what measure is your life touching others? In what measure are you being used of God to win other souls for Christ? If we have to confess, as many of us would, that we have never had the privilege of winning one soul, that so far as we know we have never yet given a testimony to any one that has really been blessed in his or her coming to Christ, let me suggest that there must be something that is hindering the outflow of the living water. Can it be that great boulders of worldliness, selfishness, pride, carnality, sinful folly or covetousness are literally choking the fountain of living water, so that there is just a little trickling when there should be a wonderful outflowing? If this is the case, seek by grace to recognize these hindrances and deal with them one by one. Away with worldliness, away with pride. Who am I to be proud? What have I to be proud of? “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” Away with carnality, away with self-seeking, away with covetousness, away with living for my own interests, and let me henceforth live alone for Him who shed His precious blood for me and redeemed me to Himself. As I thus deal with these things that hinder the outflow of the living water, I will myself enter into a new, living, blessed and wonderful experience, and my testimony then will count in blessing to those about me, and my life will be at its best for Him.

There has been some question as to the identity of the first speaker in verse sixteen. It is very evident that the one who speaks in the last sentence is the bride, but is it the bride or the bridegroom in the first part of the verse? “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” If it is the bridegroom who is speaking, then he it is who is calling on the winds to blow upon what he calls, “my garden,” the heart of his bride, in order that she may be at her best for him. If, on the other hand, as I am personally

inclined to believe, it is the bride who is speaking, then it indicates her yearning desire to be all that he would have her to be. Dear child of God, is that your desire? Do you yearn to be all that Christ would have you to be, or are you still actuated by worldly and selfish motives that hinder communion with Him? Listen to these words again, as we think of them as coming from the lips of the bride, “Awake, O north wind.” That is the cold, bitter, biting, wintry blast. Naturally she would shrink from that as we all would, and yet the cold of winter is as necessary as the warmth of summer if there is going to be perfection in fruit-bearing. It is as though she says, “Blessed God, if need be, let Thy Spirit breathe upon me through trial and sorrow, and difficulty and perplexity; take from me all in which I have trusted from the human standpoint; bereave me of everything if Thou wilt; leave me cold, naked, and alone except for Thy love, but work out Thy will in me.”

The best apples are grown in northern climes where frost and cold have to be faced. Those grown in semi-tropical countries are apt to be tasteless and insipid. It takes the cold to bring out the flavor. And it is so with our lives. We need the north winds of adversity and trial as well as the zephyrs of the south so agreeable to our natures. The very things we shrink from are the experiences that will work in us to produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness. If everything were easy and soft and beautiful in our lives, they would be insipid; there would be so little in them for God that could delight His heart; and so there must be the north wind as well as the south. But, on the other hand, we need the south wind also, and our precious Lord tempers the winds to every one of us. “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” It is a blessed thing to be in that state of soul where we can just trust ourselves to Him.

Charles Spurgeon tells of a man who had the words, “God is love,” painted on his weathervane. Some one said, “That is a queer text to put there. Do you mean to say that God’s love is as changeable as the wind” “Oh, no,” said the other; “I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is love.” Do not forget that. It may be the north wind of bereavement when your dearest and best are snatched from you, but “God is love.” It may be that the cold wind of what the world calls ill-fortune will sweep away like a fearful cyclone all that you have accumulated for years, but “God is love,” and it is written, “The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nah. 1:3).

Perhaps you have been asking questions like this, “Why has God allowed the sufferings we have had to undergo? Why has He allowed these weeks and months with no employment and everything slipping away, the savings of years gone?” Dear child of God, He giveth not account of any of His matters now, but,

then He will make it clear to you, and you will know why He allowed the cold wind to blow over His garden as well as the south wind, and if you would bow to Him now, and recognize His unchanging love, perhaps He would be able to trust you with more zephyrs from the south than you ordinarily experience. We are not subject enough to the will of God. We need to learn the lesson that, “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” In other words, “Anything, Lord, that will make me a better Christian, a more devoted saint; anything that will make me a more faithful child of Thine, so that Thou canst find Thy delight in me.” Is that your thought? And then she looks up into the face of her bridegroom and says, “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.” How He delights to get such an invitation as that from His people. He responds to her immediately, for the first verse of chapter five really belongs to this section. She no sooner says, “Come,” than he replies, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”

It closes with a scene of rapturous communion. And when you look up to the Beloved of your heart and say, “Come into Thy garden and eat Thy pleasant fruits,” He will immediately respond, “I am come.” You will never have to wait; you will never have to give Him a second invitation. If you have any time for Him, He always has time for you.

Proverbs and Song of Solomon, Song of Solomon 4:1-11

“Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee” (Song of Solomon 4:7).

IT is not strange that as we think of ow Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom, our souls are moved to their deepest depths, but it is hard for us to realize that He has a greater love for us than we could ever possibly have for Him. And so here in this fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon, we hear the bridegroom expressing to his loved one the feelings of his heart toward her, and as we read these words, as we listen to these heart-breathings, we should remember that the speaker is really our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the bride may be looked at in various ways, as we have already seen. Prophetically, WE may think of the bride as Israel, and Jehovah rejoicing over her in that coming day; individually, we may think of the bride as representing any saved soul, and the Lord expressing His delight in the one He has redeemed to Himself by His precious blood; or as that Church which Christ loved and for which He gave Himself.

So we may see in these utterances His delight in His Church. In verses one to seven of this fourth chapter, you will notice that He addresses Himself directly to the bride, and He speaks of her beauties as He sees them in a very wonderful way. The imagery, of course, as throughout this book, is strictly oriental, and goes considerably beyond what we prosaic occidentals are in the habit of using. And yet as we read it, we see that there is nothing coarse, nothing that would bring the blush to the cheek of modesty. It is the fullest, most rapturous delight of the bridegroom in the bride, but every expression is in keeping with the holiness of this blessed little book.

First, he speaks of her general appearance. Four times over in this chapter, he tells her of her fairness. Twice he declares it in verse one. He says, “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair.” In verse seven we read, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” Again in verse ten, “How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine!” And yet she had no fairness in herself, as we had no beauty in ourselves. In an earlier chapter we heard her say, “I am black as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.” But he says, as he looks at her through love’s eyes, “Thou art all fair.” Does it not bring before us the wondrous thing that our Saviour has done for every one of us who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ? We would never have been saved at all if we had not realized in some measure our own wretchedness, our own sinfulness, our unlovely character. It was because of this that we fled to Him for refuge and confessed that we were anything but fair, anything but beautiful. We took our places side by side with Job and cried, “I have heard of Thee by

the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6). We knelt beside Isaiah and exclaimed, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). We took part with Peter and cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). But when we took that place of repentance, of acknowledgment of our own natural deformity and unloveliness, He looked upon us in His grace and said, "Thou art perfect in Mine eyes by the comeliness which I have put upon thee." And now as those who have been washed from our sins in His own precious blood, He addresses us in the rapturous way that we have here, "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee." What! No spot in us, when we were stained by sin, when we were polluted by iniquity? Once it could be said of us, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isa. 1:6). And now His holy eyes cannot find one spot of sin, nor any sign of iniquity. Let this give us to understand what grace hath wrought.

It is only God's matchless grace that has thus made us accepted in the Beloved.

Then you will notice that the bridegroom looking upon his bride speaks of her person in the most glowing terms, referring to seven different things. First, he speaks of her eyes and says to her, "Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks." What does that mean? The dove was a clean bird, the bird of love and sorrow, the bird offered in sacrifice upon the altar, and thus typified our Lord Jesus as the heavenly One. And now he sees reflected in his bride that which speaks of himself. "Thou hast doves' eyes." We may not have stopped to realize it, but the dove is very keen of sight.

Recently in an eastern city, a poor carrier pigeon fell exhausted on one of those high buildings, and somebody working on the roof of the building caught it utterly unable to rise. They found attached to it a message that had come over three thousand miles, and that little dove had seen its way all along the miles, and had flown on and on until at last it had brought the message to that eastern city. When our blessed Lord says to us, "Thou art fair, My love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks," it means not only that we have eyes of beauty, but eyes quick to discern the precious and wonderful things that are hidden for us in His holy Word. Do we respond to this, or do these doves' eyes sometimes take to wandering, going out after the things of a poor godless world?

He says, "Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Mount Gilead." He refers to the Syrian goat with its long silken hair. One can imagine the beauty of the scene, a flock of goats up yonder on the mountainside. The bridegroom says, "Your hair reminds me of that." Hair, in Scripture, is a woman's glory. That is one reason why she is not supposed to follow the styles of the world and cut away her beauty and glory. You remember the woman of old who loved Jesus and knelt at His feet and washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She was using that which spoke of her beauty and her glory to minister to Him, the loving, blessed Saviour. Some of my sisters will forgive me if I say that it would be difficult for them to dry anyone's feet with their hair! Yes, her hair is a woman's glory and beauty, and, incidentally, that is exactly the reason why the Word of God tells the woman to cover her head when she comes into the presence of the Lord. When she comes in before Him whose glory fills the heavens, to join with His worshipping people, she is to cover her own glory that no one's attention may be distracted, but fixed on Christ Himself. When you get the inwardness of these things, you find there is a beauty and a privilege in them that does away with all legality, and also does away with leaving us free to follow our own judgment. In Scripture, some things are commanded because they are right, and other things are right because they are commanded. When He makes known His will, the subject Christian bows to His Word, assured that there is a reason for it, though he does not always understand it. How He delights to behold His obedient people; how He glories in their moral beauty!

Then, in the third place, he speaks of her teeth, and we may think that strange, but there is nothing more beautiful than a lovely set of pearls half-hidden in the mouth. "Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them." The two sets of teeth answer to the twins in their cleanliness and sparkling beauty, so attractive in his eyes. And how important the teeth are, spiritually speaking, because they speak to us of mastication, of the ability to properly lay hold of and digest our food. I am afraid there are a number of toothless Christians from that standpoint. Some say, "I do not know how it is, but other people read their Bibles and find such wonderful things, when I do not find much in mine." The trouble is you have such poor teeth, you do not masticate your spiritual food properly. It is by meditation that we appropriate our daily provision. David said, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (Ps. 104:34). Until He gives you a new set of spiritual teeth, you had better use some secondhand ones. Thank God for what others have found; read their books, and get something that way! By-and-by if you will wait on Him, the Lord will give you back your teeth, even if you have lost them, and you will be able to enjoy the truth for yourself.

The third verse is most lovely: "Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely." This is different from that abominable custom of today that leads so many women, of course not consistent Christian women, but those of the world and Christians living on the edge of the world, to put that filthy stuff upon their lips that makes them look like a cross between poor, low women of the street and circus performers. Here it is the red lip of health, of spiritual health. "Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely." Why? Because it is speech that has to do with Him! The bride loves to speak of the bridegroom, as the Christian loves to speak of Christ, and her lips are like a thread of scarlet, for she exalts that blood by which she has been brought nigh to God. Every real Christian will have lips like a thread of scarlet, for he gladly confesses that he owes everything for eternity to that precious atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not only when we gather at the table of the Lord, when we bow in worship as we take the bread and cup as from His blessed pierced hand, that we love to sing and speak and think of the blood; but always, everywhere, at all times, the believer delights to remember that he has been redeemed to God by the precious blood of Christ. You will find the scarlet thread running right through this Book.

God has said, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your soul; it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." "We have been redeemed to God by the precious blood of Christ, as of an unblemished spotless lamb, foreknown indeed from the foundation of the world, but manifest in these last times for you." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." And when at last we get home to heaven, our lips will be like a thread of scarlet still, for we will join in that new song and sing our praises to Him who was "slain and has loosed us from our sins in His own blood," and we will render adoration unto the Lamb whose blood was shed, that we might be made kings and priests unto God. O Christian, make much of the blood, speak often of the blood. Do not be satisfied with the namby-pamby, bloodless religion of the day. When you ask the question, "Are you a Christian?" and you get the ready answer, "Oh, yes; I belong to the church," then see that your lips are like a thread of scarlet and ask, "Are you trusting in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus alone for salvation?" So often you will find that the idle profession made a moment ago was only an empty thing. They are Christians in name only. There are thousands about us who know nothing of the cleansing value of the blood of Jesus.

“Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.” You know the temple speaks of the dome of thought, and so the bride’s thought is about her bridegroom. She loves to think of him, to meditate upon the treasures found in his word. Then he delights in her as she delights in him.

In the next verse we have the strength of her character, given her by divine grace. “Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.” David’s tower, you see, is the place of defense, the place of strength, and the bride here is one of those who can stand up straight and boldly look the world in the face, assured of the love and protection of her matchless bridegroom. And so we are called upon to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” The head won’t be hanging down like a bulrush when our hearts are taken up with Him. There will be a boldness that is never known when out of communion with Him.

Then, last of all, in the seventh place he speaks of that which tells of affection. “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.” Her heart is his, her whole being belongs to him, and he rejoices in her. We may well sing:

As we joy in Him, we will find that He will joy in us. You remember what Faber wrote:

I cannot understand why He should say, “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” I cannot comprehend such matchless grace, but my heart can rejoice in it, and so I love Him in return because He first loved me.

Following this section in which we have the bridegroom’s joy in the bride, in verses eight to eleven we have his summons to companionship with himself. The bridegroom would call his bride away from everything else that has occupied her in order to find in him her all in all. “Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!” He sees her upon the mountainside. And, you know, the mountain is the place of privilege, the place of beauty, of worldly grandeur and glory, but it is also the place of danger. The leopard’s lair is there and the lion’s den, and as he beholds her there alone, he cries, “Come with me from Lebanon... from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards.” Our blessed Lord wants the companionship of His redeemed people. How sweet those words, “Come with Me!” He never calls His people from anything, either the beautiful things of the world or the dangerous things (and after all, the beautiful is often the most dangerous), simply to take a path alone, but it is always, “Come with Me,” and you cannot afford, you who love His name, to draw back, to say, “There are other things so lovely, so beautiful, that my soul must have; I cannot leave them to go with Thee.” He who died for you, He who left heaven’s glory in order to redeem your soul, calls to you and says, “Come with Me.” Can you draw back and say, “No; it is too much to ask; I cannot leave these surroundings; I cannot leave these worldly follies; I cannot quit this place of danger for Thy sake, Lord Jesus?” Surely there is not very much love there. You need to get down before Him and confess the sin of your cold-heartedness and indifference, and ask for a fresh vision of the love that He manifested in the cross that your heart may be weaned away from everything else. Dr. Watts has put it:

Does your heart respond to that? What He desires above everything else is to see His people finding satisfaction in His company.

And then in the closing two verses of this section, verses ten and eleven, we read, “How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.” You remember in the first chapter it is she who said, looking up to him, “We will remember thy love more than wine.” Now it is he who responds to her and says, “How much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.” His people should be fragrant with the sweetness of Christ. It is said of the disciples of old, “They took knowledge that they had been with Jesus,” and if we are in His company, there will be a rich fragrance of holiness, of heavenliness, about us wherever we are found.

A minister tells of riding with another preacher on top of a bus in London, England. As they came down a poor-looking street with a big factory on one side, they were halted, and they noticed the doors of the factory had opened and hundreds of girls were pouring out and making their way across the street to a lunch room; suddenly the air was filled with a sweet delightful fragrance. The visitor said, “Isn’t that remarkable in a factory district here in London?—such wondrous fragrance! It seems like the odor of a great garden. You would not think of finding such fragrance in this district.” “Oh, you don’t understand,” said his friend; “this is one of the largest perfume-factories in all the British Isles, and these young people are working constantly among the perfumes, and everywhere they go the fragrance remains upon their garments.”

Beloved, if you and I are living in fellowship with Christ, if we keep in touch with Him, everywhere we go His fragrance will be manifested in our lives.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, April 17

He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love”— Song of Solomon 2:4.

THE Song of Solomon is the book of communion. It sets forth the nuptial joys of the Heavenly Bridegroom and the Bride of His heart as they commune together in the full recognition of mutual love and faithfulness. The bride, in this verse, is seen in the royal banquet-hall, delighting in the bountiful provision of her Kingly Bridegroom, with love’s banner waving overhead. That banner is the standard of the cross, It tells of a love that was stronger than death, which the many waters could not quench. Beneath its folds the loved one enjoys fullest fellowship as she exclaims, “I am my Beloved’s, and His desire is toward me.”

—Mrs. Cousins.

Daily Sacrifice, April 16

“Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee” — Song of Solomon 1:4.

WHILE the carnally-minded may see very little in the Canticles of an elevating character, those who have been taught of the Spirit find in it a marvelous picture of that hallowed communion between the Lord and those who enter through grace into the bridal relation with Him. To the godly in Israel the King was Jehovah and the Bride the chosen race; for the Christian the Bridegroom is our blessed Lord Himself, and the Bride the Church collectively, or the saved soul individually. Sweet it is to be drawn into His dwelling-place and to enjoy communion with Him, thus lifting the soul above all the trifling things of earth. Mary of Bethany entered into this in large measure when the Lord was actually present on earth. We today may enjoy the same precious fellowship as we meditate on the Word and lift our hearts to the Lord in prayer.

—Charles Wesley.

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