

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.

CANTICLES iv. 12-16, AND v. 1.

AS the Lord may help us, we will meditate this afternoon on the last five verses of the fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon, and the first verse of the fifth chapter. The division into chapters is simply a human arrangement, and it becomes us by no means to read or meditate on the Word of God according to that arrangement, but to observe what the Holy Ghost would teach us: sometimes the very point to be learned being lost by the division made.

THE CHARACTER OF THE BOOK.

Most of my dear Christian friends here present, if not all, know very well that in this part of the divine testimony, called the Song of Solomon, or Canticles, we have brought before us the wondrous love of the Lord ,Jesus Christ to His Church, and the love of the Church to the Lord Jesus Christ, her Redeemer, under the figure of bridegroom and bride.

This is just one of the portions which we should consider as well as any other portion of God's Word. We may naturally have little inclination for doing so, and the reason is, because our hearts are so little towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and we know so little of this real personal attachment to Him. Yet this is the very reason why we should bestir ourselves to increase in love, and to get into such a state of heart that we may understand something of the Song of Solomon. If our hearts were in greater sympathy with what we find in the Song of Solomon, we should soon see that this is just the state of heart which will find its highest degree in Heaven. And surely we should never rest satisfied till we get in some little degree to understand and enter into the joys of Heaven—till the aspirations, feelings, and desires of Heaven are found in some measure in us now.

THE NAMES GIVEN TO THE CHURCH.

Notice first, that the Lord Jesus Christ calls the Church His spouse, His sister. Wondrous grace towards sinners such as we are! When we remember that we are but wicked, guilty, and rebellious sinners by nature, does not His wondrous love indeed amaze us? Such is this love, that while we naturally are so sinful, and while each of us only seeks to gratify himself, yet the Lord Jesus Christ looks upon us as His sister and spouse. Wonderful yet thus it is!

And this is not only said regarding the eminent saints, as John the aged in Patmos, or Paul the prisoner at Rome. It is said of them; but it is also true of you and me, provided that we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. Every one of us who accepts the provision which the Lord has made for sin in the person of Christ,—every such an one has scriptural warrant to look upon himself as part of the spouse of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as belonging to the bride of Christ.

THE ABSENT BRIDEGROOM.

Oh, how precious, how unspeakably precious and blessed is this! We are His bride, and the Lord Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a place for the bride—a mansion in His Father's house; and when He has made it ready, He will come again to take the bride to Himself. For the Lord Jesus cannot be satisfied, until the Church, His bride, is with Him in the place of honour and glory, which the Father has given to Him as the reward of His perfect obedience—His obedience even unto death—in this world, while doing the Father's will. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

So, when we read such a portion of Scripture as the one before us, we should read it with reference to ourselves. Each one of us should say, Though I am a poor miserable sinner, I belong to the spouse of Christ; I am part of the bride of the Lamb. Do you say this in your hearts? Who among you can say this? Do all of you, who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of your souls, say of yourselves, Though naturally I am a vile, wicked sinner, yet I do belong to the bride of Christ. I am one of those for whom He is preparing a place. I shall be with Him in the mansions which He is getting ready. Soon He is coming to take me with Him, that I may be where He is.

You see it is just in the measure in which we are able to appropriate the statements in the Scriptures to ourselves, that we enjoy them. The point is not how much we speak about these things, how much we write about them, how much we read about them, how much we preach about them. It is not how many books we may have written about the things of God; but it is how far do we appropriate them to ourselves, and know the power of them in our own hearts. Only in so far as this is the case, will the Word of God be really profitable to our own souls.

Now here, before going any further, the point is,

DO WE BELONG TO THE SPOUSE OF CHRIST, OR NOT?

If I do believe in Christ, and trust in Him alone for the salvation of my soul, that is the point. Let each of us see if this is the case. Can we each say, Although I am a poor miserable sinner, yet I have trusted and do trust in Him. If I have never seen that I am a sinner, and as a sinner deserving punishment and nothing but punishment, and for escape from this punishment, have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, then all these things do not refer to me. But, while this is the case, it is not too late yet. The door is still open, that we may enter and find mercy. Just as in that beautiful hymn we have just sung—

“Whosoever cometh need not delay,
Now the door is open; enter while you may;
Jesus is the true, the only living Way;
Whosoever will may come.”

Only let us put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, and then all these blessings apply as really and truly to each of us as they applied to John in the Isle of Patmos, or to Paul the apostle a prisoner in Rome. Therefore, now—now—now is the time. The door of mercy is open wide still. God is willing to hear for Christ’s sake. Come thus, and you will have salvation.

I suppose that those to whom I speak are all in this ‘blessed state; but if not, let them come thus, and they will be brought into it.

Now let us see what the Lord Jesus Christ says of His Church—

“A GARDEN ENCLOSED IS MY SISTER, MY SPOUSE.”

What does this mean? Literally it means, barred—locked up. But what is it intended to convey here? When a garden is locked up, as we all know very well, it is that the proprietor may have the right only to enter, or those to whom he may give this right; and that not every one may have access to the garden to help himself to the fruits as he pleaseth. The garden is not only enclosed by walls, as would seem here; but in the Hebrew it is “locked-up,” or “barred;” so that none but the proprietor may have access. Who is He? The Lord Jesus Christ: and He alone may have access to our hearts, and not any one else, as He pleases.

What, then, does this deeply important truth convey to us? Simply that we are bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ; that we are set apart for the glory of Christ. He, and He alone, has any right to us, and the devil has none.

THE BELIEVER IS NOT HIS OWN.

More than this, we have no right to ourselves. “We are not our own, we are bought with a price.” We are not our own masters. No one can say, My time is my own, as the world does say. It is not mine. My time, my talents are not mine, they are God’s. My business even is not mine, it is God’s. My house, my lands, my purse, everything I have is not mine, it belongs to the Lord; for He has bought me with His precious blood, and having bought me, He has purchased all that I have.

All this is implied in the figure used, “a garden enclosed.” But, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, let me ask you affectionately, Is it thus with you? I have desired, time after time, to press the passages, upon which we have been meditating, home to your hearts; so this afternoon do I desire to impress this point on your hearts. Do you enter into this? Do you rejoice in this, That you are not your own, that you are bought by the precious blood of Christ, and that you and all you have belong entirely to Him? Your hands, your feet are His, and therefore are to be employed for Him. Your eyes, your tongue, your talents, your time, and your purse, are all His, and therefore to be used for Him. Your business and your possessions are His; everything you have belongs to Him, being bought by His precious blood, and thus set apart for His use. He has access to all these things, and He alone ought to have this access. He is the Master, and we are but stewards whom He will order as He pleases.

Let us seek to enter into this, that we are set apart for His use, and so we shall be enabled to bring forth more abundant fruit to the praise and honour and glory of God. This is intended by the Holy Ghost to be conveyed to our hearts by the figure, “a garden enclosed.”

But there is still more.

“A SPRING SHUT UP.”

Why is it shut up? When an earthly spring is shut up, it is that not everyone may have a right to it, but that the owner, or any to whom he may allow the right and privilege of access to the spring, may be able to drink of the water, and none others.

It is, then, another figure used by the Holy Ghost to teach us the truth we have already been considering—to show us that we are the Lord’s, and that we are set apart that He may use us as He pleases. That we have no right to our time and talents, but that they all belong to Him.

Some think it is all the same how they spend their time, whether in learning to play instruments or otherwise. Others have a desire to learn sciences or lan-

guages, and they think they have a perfect right to do so if they feel inclined. Now I do not mean to say that such things are sinful, if we have time for them; but no one has any right thus to employ his time or talents until he has laid it before the Lord, and has asked, Is it Thy will that I should spend my time in learning to play this instrument, or this science, or this language? Shall I thereby serve Thee or otherwise? If it is the will of the Lord, then it is right and proper thus to employ our time. So with everything we have, as our time, money and talents, they are His; and we ought not to use them unless it be for the praise and honour and glory of God.

But here another figure is used, not only “a garden enclosed,” and “a spring shut up,” but also

“A FOUNTAIN SEALED.”

Further, and more particularly still, not simply “a spring shut up,” but still more pointedly, to mark that the owner of the spring alone has right of access to it, it is called “a fountain sealed.” It is His, and His only, and therefore there is a seal on it; and no one dare break that seal to take water out of the spring.

The spring is His; the water which is in it came from Him; the water that He has put there is for Him and for His use. Therefore, the living water which is in it, is to be used only for the praise, and honour, and glory of His great name. This brings before us for the third time, more minutely than before, that we are the Lord’s. Therefore we are to learn to be more decidedly out and out for the Lord; and we should never look on ourselves as belonging to this world, or as being our own; but should ever remember that we are bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and that thus we, and all we have, and all we are, belong solely to the Master for His glory and use.

JOY OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH.

So much for the first point in the portion before us. Now the Lord Jesus Christ speaks in praise of His bride, the Church. And how does He speak of her? “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.” He means by these figures to convey the delight which He, the bridegroom, takes in the Church, His bride; to show us how dear we are to His heart, and what loveliness and beauty He sees in us. And how He is delighted with our service, although it may be but little, and how our worship and praise are sweet as incense to Him.

Wonderful, is it not? that such as we poor miserable sinners are, should yet be able with our service, and worship, and love to give delight to the Lord. Everything we do or think is in a greater or less degree mingled with sin, and yet we are acceptable—even delightful—in His sight.

AN ILLUSTRATION.

Take, for instance, this poor service I am rendering for Him now. I have set out from home to offer a word here and there, as God may give me openings; and as He may help me, I am seeking to speak a word, specially of counsel and advice, for the younger brethren and sisters in Christ, to uphold the honour and glory of His name. One or another may say, What a good thing that is! But what does this poor worm say of himself? Before my God, I say I am a poor, miserable sinner. Although I do not live in open sin, and do not give occasion to people to point at me and say, “See what he is doing again; see how inconsistent he is.” Not thus with me; but still I am but a sinner in myself, and all I do or say is more or less mixed with sin. All my efforts need the precious blood of Christ to cleanse them; and I have to go with my preaching to the Lord, to make me clean in all these poor attempts to serve Him, or to help my brethren.

ACCEPTED SERVICE.

Yet with all this, I know that the Lord Jesus looks on me and on my service with complacency and with delight; and that He delights in me, and that He says of me, “He is my beloved servant: I will go with him as he labours for me, I delight in his work and will accept his service as rendered unto Me, in the riches of My grace.” That is the thought of the blessed Lord and Master concerning me, His unworthy servant; while I myself see nothing but defilement in my service.

Such is the truth taught us in these verses—the joy of the Lord in His Church. It is that the Lord Jesus Christ looks with delight and complacency on His people. He does not see sin in us: He sees His own comeliness reflected in us—His own beauty in us, and His own spotless righteousness, and therefore it is that His eye sees in us that which is beautiful, lovely, and which pleases Him. All that is in us good is of Himself and not of us.

This brings before us another deeply important point. It is this: that if the Lord Jesus Christ looks on us with delight, although weak and erring as we are, so we should look on each other. The natural tendency is, to see in our brother or sister their failings and errors; but we ought to aim after this—to find out

Christ in one another; and if there be found in such and such a poor sinner anything of Christ, though it be but little, then let us delight in it.

BEARING THE INFIRMITIES OF THE WEAK.

There is frequently much weakness at first in the divine life, but spiritual strength will increase. Just as we see in Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews; and also in the case of Joseph, of Arimathea, who at first did not own the Lord boldly and plainly; yet afterwards, we find them so much grown in grace, that when all the disciples—courageous Peter and beloved John—had forsaken their Master and fled, then these two, who were so weak at first, came openly forward and asked the body of their Lord, that they might bury it.

Therefore we ought to look lovingly on weak disciples, for they may be strengthened and put us to shame; and you and I, instead of looking at their weakness and shortcomings, ought to seek to find out Christ in them. If we do so, we shall find how dear they will become to our hearts, and we shall love them. The natural tendency is, to look at the weakness and failings of others; but let us strive to overcome this, and, like the Lord Jesus Christ, see the beauty and comeliness of our Master in our fellow disciples.

CHRIST'S ESTIMATE OF HIS BRIDE.

These are the particular lessons, which we have gathered from these verses—that Jesus sees beauty in us His people, that He sees loveliness, that He sees the beautiful fruits and spices, to which reference is here made, which, although we do not find them in our gardens in this country, yet are they most precious fruits in the gardens of the East: and if He sees all this comeliness in us, surely we should see beauty and something to delight us in one another.

Now, further, in the description of the Church we read—"A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." "A fountain of gardens." This does not mean a fountain producing gardens, as it might here be taken to mean, but a fountain in the midst of gardens. A fountain, the waters of which refresh and nourish the gardens. This He says further of His Church, and here He again uses three figures, even as we notice with regard to the first point. The figures are—first, "a fountain of gardens;" second, "a well of living waters;" and lastly, "streams from Lebanon."

What do these figures imply? First of all, let us consider the figure—

"A FOUNTAIN OF GARDENS."

He means here, that in this world we are, or ought to be, for the refreshment and nourishment of one another; for the strengthening and invigorating of one another. Just as by a fountain in the midst of a garden, the plants are watered and nourished, and all the vegetation is benefited thereby, and the beautiful and fragrant flowers are refreshed: so the Church of Christ is left upon the earth to be a like blessing; not that she should merely enjoy His fulness herself, but in order that she should be for the fertilising of those surrounding her, and especially that she may lend a helping hand to the brethren and sisters, particularly the younger brethren and sisters in Christ. This is the very purpose for which we are left in this world, that we may be as fountains of water, and especially for the strengthening and encouraging of one another, and the refreshing, nourishing, and watering of one another, even as the fountain in the midst of gardens.

But now, the second figure:

“A WELL OF LIVING WATERS.”

What does this mean? In John vii. 38, Jesus said, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly 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.” It was of the Holy Ghost He spake.

Now the Holy Ghost has been given. The Church in her collective capacity has received the Holy Ghost, and every individual believer has received that gift; therefore we are expected to be wells of living waters. There is no reason why out of you and me individually, there should not flow rivers of living water. The living water which has been given us ought to flow out to others. Have we all considered this, that for this very reason has been given to us the Holy Ghost? Just in order that we may minister to the world around us. We ought to be the means of good to our fellow sinners, and out of us there should flow rivers of living water, that poor sinners all around, young and old, rich and poor, whether enemies or friends, should be benefited.

And not merely so, but we should also be as wells of living water, to the dear fellow believers. They oft may and do stand in need of refreshing and comforting, and it should be our aim, to seek to be the messengers of this blessed help to these our brethren; we ought to aim so to live and act, that here, there, and everywhere, as God gives us opportunity, we may seek to spread far and wide the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. That is what is meant here—that we should not

only be as fountains in the midst of gardens, but even as wells of living waters going out to benefit others; that out of us should flow rivers of living water.

Further, regarding this point, there is another figure used by the Holy Ghost—

“STREAMS FROM LEBANON.”

What is meant here? It goes still further than the other figures. When the snow melted under the summer sun on the heights of Lebanon, then mighty torrents poured down from the mountain, sweeping everything before them. Nothing could stand in the way of these streams. So should streams of living water flow out of us, with so much divine force and power, that the people of this world shall not be able to stand before us, but shall be constrained to say that of a truth God is with us.

If such were our state, we should carry away all before us, being strong in the Lord; and hundreds, yea thousands, would be converted. The whole Church surrounding us, which may be cold and dead, would be quickened and set on fire, and all would be stirred up to new love and joy. Thus must we become blessings to many around us. Surely we ought all to aim after this, to be like “streams (torrents) from Lebanon.”

We may have been idle, but let slumber and sleep rest upon us no more; and even when we have been stirred to some effort, let us not go back into a cold, lifeless state, but having done all to stand. “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always and with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

That is to be our attitude—

STRONG IN THE ARMOUR OF GOD;

or, according to the figure which we have been considering, like mighty torrents coming down from Lebanon, carrying everything before them, and being never discouraged by anything we may meet. Because those mighty torrents, to which this figure likens us, were never discouraged or beaten back, but carried everything before them.

Oh, that this were impressed upon our hearts, that we have power as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we can accomplish great things by prayer and by faith; that none can withstand us, if we go in His power; that great as may be our enemies, yet greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us! And all the powers of darkness cannot withstand us, if we work in the strength of God and look to Him and trust in Him alone. For all that is before us cannot be accomplished by our own power or resources. If this were more deeply impressed upon our hearts, we should become more and more useful to the praise and honour and glory of God.

RECIPROCAL DELIGHT.

But I must hasten on, as I have still two verses to speak of. In the sixteenth verse, to which we now come, the Church is speaking. The Lord Jesus Christ has spoken in the highest terms of the Church, and now the Church, His bride, speaks of Him in return. She delights in giving joy to the heart of the Lord Jesus; to see Him partaking of her fruit with pleasure, and to see Him gratifying His loving heart with her. Therefore she now says, "Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Meaning, in other words, What I am I am for the Lord's sake. What I have received I have received for the Lord's sake, that I have belongs not to me but to the Master, who has bought me with His precious blood. Therefore I take delight, joy, and pleasure in gratifying His heart who bought me. All I have and all I am I take delight in rendering back to Him again.

It is with this feeling that the Church responds to the loving words of the Lord Jesus, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out," because the wind causes the spices and sweet fragrance of a garden to flow forth, so that the owner may enjoy the smell thereof.

And here we observe that whether it be the pleasant south wind or the strong, rough north wind, it is all the same; only that my blessed owner may be gratified by spices which flow out. Whether it be the sweet soothing influence of love, or the blows of affliction, it matters not, so that He is gratified by the display of the graces which He hath given.

But she proceeds to say "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." Do you seek thus to

GRATIFY THE HEART OF JESUS?

My beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, we can verily do so. Really and truly, poor, miserable sinners in ourselves though we are, we can gratify the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not personally here now,—He is gone up into Heaven. We have to do with a risen Lord Jesus Christ, who is now at the right hand of God. Yet we can gratify the heart of this Jesus. We can cause sweet spices to ascend to Him; He can come into our company, even now, and enjoy our graces.

Shall I mention one of the ways in which, amongst many others, that might be mentioned, and which you must know yourselves, we can thus gratify His loving heart. It is this—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." There is a poor brother or sister without food, without clothes; needing money, words of comfort or encouragement, or in any way a helping hand. Now, whatsoever ye do to that brother is done to and accepted by Jesus Christ as done to Himself.

Thus we shall gratify His heart in doing so. And we shall be saying, "Let my beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits." Let me ask you affectionately—are you doing this? Are you lending a helping hand to any weak or suffering brother, and in so doing gratifying the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ?

THE LORD'S RESPONSE.

Now Jesus responds to the words of His bride—"I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse; I have gathered My myrrh with My spices; I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey; I have drank My wine with My milk; eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." What is this? I belong to Jesus, I am His sister, His spouse. I belong to the Church, that Church is His — by the grace of God we are what we are, by the grace of God we have what we have; we have and are is His by divine right. While He accepts the longings of our heart to offer ourselves to Him, still He would have us remember that we do belong to Him.

Thus the Lord Jesus Christ brings before us, that we are His through Him and have received all we have from Him. He would have us keep in mind that we are His through Him, and what we have is through Him. We are wholly His, and to the very last day of our earthly pilgrimage, all we ever have in the world is of Him. While therefore the Church invites Him to come into the garden and partake of the pleasant fruits, yet He claims it as His own by right. He does accept and rejoice in our offer of it, but would have us understand that it is already all His own.

THE INVITATION.

Lastly, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” If there be anyone who desires to partake of these blessings, the Lord Jesus Christ says to him, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly.” Which literally means, “be drunk with love.” Oh, aim above everything after this—to increase and abound in love; as it were, to be drunk with love—intoxicated with love! Oh, that we might know something more of this, and be so brimful of love to Jesus, and brimful of love to everyone, that it were running over to all around us! Jesus delights in seeing us filled with love, intoxicated with love, drunk with love. May we aim increasingly after this!