

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE KING FEASTING IN HIS GARDEN.

A Sermon

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“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.”—
Solomon's Song v. i.

I BELIEVE this text to be appropriate to the spiritual condition of our church. If I am not very sadly mistaken, the Lord of Hosts is with us in a very remarkable manner. Our meetings for prayer have been distinguished by an earnest and fervent spirit; our meetings with enquirers have been remarkably powerful; in a quiet manner, without any outward outcries, souls have been smitten down with conviction of sin, and have been comforted as they have received Christ by faith. We are not a deserted church, we are not left with broken hedges, with the wild boar of the wood committing devastations; but the Lord hath sent a gracious rain, which has quickened the seed, and he hath watered the plants of his garden, and made our souls to rejoice in his presence. Now if the text be appropriate, as I believe it is, the duty to which it especially calls us should have our earnest attention. The workers for Christ must remember that even if they have to care for the garden, their chief business must be to commune with the Lord and Master of that garden, since he himself this morning calls them to do so. “Eat O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” In happy and auspicious times, when the Spirit of God is working, it is very natural to say, “We must now work more abundantly than ever,” and God forbid that we should hinder such zeal, but the more spiritual privilege is not to be put in the second place. Let us commune as well as work; for therein shall we find strength for service, and our service shall be done the better, and become the more acceptable, and ensure the larger blessing. If while we serve like Martha, we at the same time commune like Mary, we shall not then become cumbered with much serving; we shall serve and not be cumbered, and shall feel no fretfulness against others whose only faculty may be that of sitting at the Master's feet.

The text divides itself readily into three parts. First, we have *the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom*—“I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse;” we have, secondly, *the satisfaction which he finds in his church*—“I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk;” and, thirdly, we have *the invitation which he gives to his loving people*—“Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”

I. The voice of the Master himself calls us to consider HIS PRESENCE: "I am come."

He tells us he is come. What? Could he come without our perceiving it? Is it not possible? May we be like those whose eyes were holden so that they knew him not? Is it possible for us to be like Magdalen, seeking Christ, while he is standing very near us? Yes, and we may even be like the disciples who, when they saw him walking on the water, were afraid, and thought it was a spirit, and cried out, and had need for him to say, "It is I, be not afraid," before they knew who it was! Here is our ignorance, but here is his tenderness. He may come and yet we may not recognise him; but here when he cometh, he takes care to advertise us of the blessed fact, and calls us to observe and to consider, and to delight in it. He would, for our own comfort, prevent its being said of us, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

Let us observe, first, *this coming was in answer to prayer*. Our translators, in dividing the Bible into chapters, seem to have been utterly regardless of the connection or the sense, so that they brought down their guillotine between two verses which must not be divided. The church had said, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden;" she had also said, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." In answer to that prayer the Beloved replies, "I am come into my garden." Prayer is always heard, and the prayer of faithful souls finds an echo in Jesus' heart. How quickly the spouse was heard! Scarce had the words died away, "Let my Beloved come," before she heard him say, "I am come!" "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." He is very near unto his people, and hence he very speedily answers their request. And how fully does he answer it too! You will perhaps say, "But she had asked for the Holy Spirit, she had said, 'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;' and yet there is no mention of the heavenly wind as blowing through the garden." The answer is that the Beloved's coming means all that. His visit brings both north and south wind; all benign influences are sure to follow where *he* leads the way; spices always flow out from the heart when Christ's sweet love flows in, and where he is, Christians have all things in him. There was a full answer to her prayer, and there was more than an answer, for she had but said, "Let him come and eat," but, lo, he gathers myrrh and spice, and he drinks of wine and milk; he does exceeding abundantly above what she had even asked or even thought, after the right royal manner of the Son of God, who doth not answer us according to the poverty of our expressions and the leanness of our desires, but according to his riches in glory, giving to us grace upon grace out of his own inexhaustible fulness. Brethren, this church has had a full reward for all her prayers. We have waited upon God often, all the day long there has been prayer in this house, and during this last month there has scarcely been an hour in which supplication has been suspended; and the answer has already come. We are so apt to overlook the answer to prayer. Let it not be so. Let us praise the Lord that prayer has not been a vain service. It has brought down his presence, the chief of all blessings, and that

for which we most interceded at his throne. Let us exalt him. We can hear him say now, "I am come into your meetings, I am blessing you, I am saving souls, I am elevating some of you into nearness of fellowship with myself, I am chastening some of your spirits with sadness to think you have lived in so grovelling an estate; I am with you, I have heard your prayers, I have come to abide with you as a people."

Now, if this be the case, let us next observe *what an unspeakable blessing this is!* If the voice had said, "I have sent my angel," that would have been a precious boon; but it is not so spoken; the word is, "*I am come.*" What, doth *he* before whom angels adoringly bow their heads; doth *he* before whom perfect spirits cast their crowns, doth *he* condescend to come into the church? Ay, it is even so. There is a personal presence of Christ in the midst of his people. Where two or three are met together in his name, there is he in the midst of them; his corporeal presence is in heaven, but his spiritual presence, which is all we want—all it is expedient for him as yet to grant—is assuredly in our midst. He is with us truly and really when we meet together in our solemn assemblies, and with us too when we separate and go our ways in private to fight the battles of the Lord.

Brethren, for us to enjoy his presence as a church, is a privilege whose value is only to be measured by the melancholy results of his absence. Where Jesus Christ is not in the garden, the plants wither, and like untimely figs, the fruits fall from the trees. Blossoms come not, or if they appear, they do but disappoint when Jesus is not there to knit and fructify them; but when he comes, even the driest boughs in the garden become like Aaron's rod that budded. Yes, our older brethren in the church remember times of trouble, times when the ministry was not with power, when the gatherings on the Lord's-day were joyless, when the voice of wailing saddened the courts of Zion; but now we do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. The contrast between the past and the joyous present should increase our gratitude till we praise the Lord on the high-sounding cymbals with jubilant exaltation.

Remember, too, that if he had dealt with us according to our sins, and rewarded us after our iniquities, we should never have heard the footfall of the Beloved traversing the garden. How many have grieved the Holy Spirit by careless living and backsliding! How have most of us followed him afar off instead of keeping step with him in service and fellowship! Alas! my Lord, if thou hadst regarded only the sins of the pastor of the church, thou hadst long ago left this flock; but thou hast not dealt with us severely, but according unto thy love and to thy mercy thou hast blotted out our sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud our transgressions, and still dost thou condescend to come into thy garden.

If you take each word of this remarkable sentence, you will find a meaning. "*I am come.*" There is the *personal* presence of Christ "*I am come.*" There is the *certainty* that it is so. It is no delusion, no dream, no supposition. "*I am truly come.*" Blessed be the name of the Lord, at this present time it is assuredly so. Many of his saints can bear testimony that they have seen his face and have felt the kisses of his lips, and have proved even this day that his love is better than wine.

Note the next word, "I am come *into* my garden." How near is the approach of Christ to his church! he comes not to the garden door, nor to look over the wall, nor in at the gate and out again; but *into* his garden. Down every walk, midst the green alleys, among the beds of spices he walks, watching each flower, pruning the superfluous foliage of every fruit-bearing plant, and plucking up by the roots such as his heavenly Father hath not planted. His delights are with the sons of men. His intercourse with his chosen is most familiar; so that the spouse may sing, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." Jesus Christ the Lord forgets not his church, but fulfils the promise: "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Brethren, this is a solemn as well as a pleasant fact. You who are members of this church, recollect that Jesus is come into the church, that he is now going his rounds among you, and marking your feelings towards him; he knows to-day who is in fellowship with him, and who is not; he discerneth between the precious and the vile. He never comes without the winnowing fan when he visits his threshing floor; beware if thou be as chaff. He hath come into his garden. O you that have not enjoyed much of his gracious company, pray him to cast a look towards you, and be you like the sunflower which turns its face to the sun, to refresh itself with his beams. O pant and long for his presence. If your soul is as dark as the dead of night, call out to him, for he heareth the faintest sigh of any of his chosen.

"I am come into *my* garden," saith he. Note here the *possession which Christ claims in the church*. If it were not *his* garden, he would not come into it. A church that is not Christ's church shall have none of his presence, and a soul that is not Christ's has no fellowship with him. If he reveal himself at all, it is unto his own people, his blood-bought people, the people that are his by purchase and by power, and by the surrender of themselves to him. When I think of this church as committed to my care, I am overawed, and well may my fellow-officers be cast down under the weight of our responsibility; but after all we may say, "Master, this garden is not ours; it is *thy* garden. We have not begotten all this people, neither can we carry them in our bosoms; but thou, great Shepherd of the sheep, thou will guard the fold." Since the garden is his own, he will not suffer even the least plant to perish. My brethren who work for Christ, do not be downcast if certain portions of the work should not seem to succeed. *He* will attend to it. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." It is more his work than ours, and souls are more under his responsibility than ours. So let us hope and be confident, for the Master will surely smile upon his "vineyard of red wine."

The next word denotes *cultivation*. "I am come into *my* garden." The church is a cultivated spot; it did not spring up by chance, it was arranged by himself, it has been tended by himself, and the fruits belong to himself. Thankful are we if we can truly know that as a church—

"We are a garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground."

Christ, the Great Cultivator, exercises care and skill in training his people, and he delights to see his own handiwork in them.

And then there are the two choice words at the close, by which he speaks of his church herself rather than of her work. As if he would draw the attention of his people to themselves and to himself, rather than to their work; he says, "*My sister, my spouse.*" There is one name for the garden, but there are two names for herself. The work is his work, the garden is his garden, but see, he wants communion not so much with the work as with the worker, he speaks to the church herself. He calls her, "*My sister, my spouse.*" "*Spouse*" has something in it of dearness that is not in the first word, for what can be dearer to the husband than the bride? But then there was a time when the spouse was not dear to the bridegroom, there was a period perhaps when he did not know her, when there was no relationship between them twain; though they are made of one flesh by marriage, yet they were of different families; and for this cause he adds the dear name of "*sister,*" to show an ancient relationship to her, a closeness and a nearness by blood, by birth, as well as by betrothal and wedlock. The two words put together make up a confection of such inexpressible sweetness, that instead of seeking to expound them to you, I will leave them to your meditations, and may he who calls the church "*Sister*" and "*Spouse*" open up their richness to your souls.

Here, then, is the gist of the whole matter. The Master's presence is in this church in a very remarkable manner. Beloved, I pray that none of you may be like Adam, who fled among the trees to hide himself from God when he walked in the garden. May your business not act like an overshadowing thicket, to conceal you from fellowship. He calls you, O backslider, he calls you as once he called Adam: "Where art thou?" Come, beloved, come and commune with your Lord; come away from those carking cares and anxieties which, like gloomy groves of cypress, conceal thee from thy Lord, or rather thy Lord from thee. Hearest thou not his call, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Let none of us be like the disciples in another garden when their Lord was there, and he was in agony, but they were sleeping. Up, ye sleepers, for Christ has come. If the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," awoke the virgins, shall not "I am come" awaken you? It is his own voice; it is not "He cometh," but "I am come." Start up, ye slumberers, and now with heart and soul seek fellowship with him. It would be a sad thing if while Christ is with us any should be slumbering, and then should wake up and say, "Surely God was in this place and I knew it not." Rather may you invite him to come into your souls, and abide with you until the day break and the shadows flee away, and you behold him face to face.

II. Thus much upon the first point; and now may his Holy Spirit help us to view OUR LORD'S SATISFACTION IN HIS CHURCH.

The beautiful expressions of the text are capable of many holy meanings, and it is not possible that any expositions of mine could fully unveil their treasures; but let me observe, first, that Christ is delighted with *the offerings* of his people. He says, "I have gathered

my myrrh with my spice." We may consider myrrh and spice—sweet perfumes—offered by way of incense to God, as being indicative of the offerings which his people bring to him. What if I say that prayer is like sweet-smelling myrrh, and that the Beloved has been gathering the myrrh of holy prayer, the bitter myrrh of repenting sighs and cries, in the midst of this church, lo, these many months! You perhaps thought that poor wordless prayer of yours was never heard, but Jesus gathered it, and called it spice; and when some brother was praying aloud, and in silence your tears fell thick and fast for perishing sinners, for you could not bear that they should die, nor endure that Christ's name should be blasphemed, the Beloved gathered up the precious drops, and counted them as costly oil of sweetest smell. Was it not said in the Psalm, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually"? And you did pray for him that his name might be as ointment poured forth, and that he might gird his sword upon his thigh, and ride forth prosperously. Jesus observed, and delighted in your heart's offering. Others knew not that you prayed, perhaps you thought yourself that you scarcely prayed, but he gathered his myrrh with his spice from you. No faithful prayer is lost. The groanings of his people are not forgotten, he gathers them as men gather precious products from a garden which they have tilled with much labour and expense.

And then, may not spice represent our praises? for these, as well as prayer, come up as incense before his throne. Last Thursday night, when my brother spoke to you, if you felt as I did I am sure your heart sent up praise as a smoke of incense from the warm coals of a censer, as he cast on them handfuls of frankincense in the form of various motives for gratitude and reasons for praise. Oh, it was good to sing God's praises as we then did by the hour together. It was delightful, too, to come to his table and make that ordinance in very deed a eucharistical service of praise to God. Praise is pleasant and comely, and most of all so because Jesus accepts it, and says, "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth me."

When the Lord in another place speaks of offering sweet cane bought with money, does he not refer to other offerings which his people bring in addition to their prayers and their praises, when they give to him the first fruits of all their increase, and present thankofferings to his name. He has said, "None of you shall appear before me empty," and I hope none of you have been content to do so! The contributions given for the spread of his cause, for the feeding of his poor, and clothing of his naked ones, are given by true hearts directly to himself. Though they may be but as two mites that make a farthing, yet offered in his name are they not also included in this word, "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice"?

The Saviour's satisfaction is found, in the next place, in his people's love—"I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey." Shall I be wrong if I believe that this sweetness refers to Christian love, for this is the richest of all the graces, and sweetens all the rest. Jesus Christ finds delightful solace in his people's love, both in the inward love which is like the honey, and in the outward manifestation of it, which is like the honeycomb. He rejoices in the love that drips in all its preciousness from the heart, and in the honeycomb of organisation,

in which it is for order's sake stored up and put into his hand. Or, what if it should mean that Christ overlooks the imperfections of his people? The honeycomb is not good eating, but he takes that as well as the honey! "I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey." As he looks upon his people, and sees what he has done for them, his loving heart rejoices in what his grace has accomplished. As a benevolent man who should have taken a child from the street and educated it, would be pleased see it growing up, prospering, happy, well-informed, talented, so when Jesus Christ, remembering what his people were, sees in them displays of grace, desires after holiness, self-denials, communion with God, and the like, this is to him like honey. He takes an intense satisfaction in the sweet fruits which he himself has caused us to produce; notwithstanding every imperfection, he accepts our love, and says, "I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey."

Turning again to our precious text, we observe that our Lord's satisfaction is compared to drinking as well as eating, and that drinking is of a twofold character. "I have drunk my wine." Does he intend by this his *joy* which is fulfilled in us when our joy is full? Does he mean that, as men go to feasts to make glad their hearts with wine, so he comes to his people to see their joy, and is filled with exultation? Meaneth he not so? Surely he doth. And the milk, may not that mean the Christian's common, ordinary *life*? As milk contains all the constituents of nourishment, may he not mean by this the general life of the Christian? Our Lord takes delight in the graces of our lives. One has said that wine may represent those actions resulting from well-considered dedication and deep spiritual thought; for wine must be expressed from the grape with labour and preserved with care, there must be skill, and work, and forethought spent upon it; but milk is a natural production, it flows freely, plentifully, spontaneously; it is a more common and ordinary, yet precious thing. So the Lord delights that his people should give to him these elaborate works which they have to tend with long care and watch over with much anxiety before they are produced. These are the wine; but he would have them give him the simple outgushing of their souls, the ejaculations which flow forth without labour, the little deeds of love which need no forethought, the every day outgoings of their inner life—these are milk, and are equally acceptable to him. Well, if it be so, certain it is that Christ finds great pleasure in his people, and in their various forms of piety he drinks his wine with his milk.

Permit me now to call your attention to those many great little words, which are yet but one—I refer to the word "*my*." Observe, that eight or nine times it is repeated. Here is the reason for the solace which the bridegroom finds in his church. Does he walk in the church as men do in a garden for pleasure? Then he says, "I am come into *my* garden." Does he talk with his beloved? It is because he calls her "*my* sister, *my* spouse." Does he love her prayers and praises? It is because they never would be prayed or praised if he had not created these fruits of the lips. He says not, "I have gathered *your* myrrh with *your* spice." Oh, no! viewed as ours these are poor things, but viewed as his they are most acceptable, "I have gathered *my* myrrh

with *my* spice." So if he finds any honey in his people, any true love in them, he first put it there. "I have eaten *my* honeycomb with *my* honey." Yes, and if there be any joy and life in them to make his heart glad, he calls it "*my* wine," and "*my* milk." When I read these words, and thought of our Lord's being fed by us, I could almost have cried out, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? Dost thou find any satisfaction in us? Surely, our goodness extendeth not to thee. Whence should we give thee aught to eat?" Yet he declares it, and we may blushing believe him, and praise his name, for surely if he found it so, it is because he made it so. If he has gotten anything out of us, he must first have put it in us; if he sees of the travail of his soul, it is because the travail came first.

Note well, ye lovers of Jesus, that our Lord in this heavenly verse is fed first. "I have eaten," says he, and then he turns to us, and says, "Eat, O friends." If any of you seek friendship with the Wellbeloved, you must commence by preparing him a feast. Remember our Lord's own parable: "Which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by-and-by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?" Even if your poverty compels you to say, "As the Lord liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse," listen to him as he answers, "Fear not, make me thereof a little cake first." Be assured that after you have so done, your barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail. The way for believers to be fed by Christ is to seek to feed him; look to his being satisfied, and he will assuredly look to you. "Ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God." (Lev. xxiii. 14.) "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." See, my brethren, ye must find meat for your Lord, and then, but not till then, there shall be meat for you.

In the feast, it is remarkable how complete the entertainment is. There is the sweetest food, and the most nourishing and exhilarating drink, and then over and above there is the rarest perfume, not counted to be needful in ordinary entertainments, but crowning all and making up a right royal feast. How marvellous that our Beloved should find within his church all that his soul wants! Having given over himself to her, he delights in her, he rests in his love, and rejoices over her with singing. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and this day he continues to be filled with the selfsame delight.

III. I would fain linger, but time forbids. We must now remember, in the third place, that the text contains an INVITATION.

The Beloved says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." In the invitation we see the character of the invited guests; they are spoken of as *friends*. We were once aliens, we are now

brought nigh; we were once enemies, we are made servants, but we have advanced from the grade of service (though servants still) into that of friends, henceforth he calls us not servants, but friends, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but all things that he has seen of his Father he has made known unto us. The friendship between Christ and his people is not in name only, but in deed and in truth. Having laid down his life for his friends, having brought them to know his friendship in times of trial and of difficulty, he at all times proves his friendship by telling his secrets to them, and exhibiting an intense sympathy with them in all their secret bitter-nesses. David and Jonathan were not more closely friends than Christ and the believer, when the believer lives near to his Lord. Never seek the friendship of the world, nor allow your love to the creature to overshadow your friendship with Christ.

He next calls his people *beloved* as well as friends. He multiplieth titles, but all his words do not express the full love of his heart. "Beloved." Oh, to have this word addressed to us by Christ! It is music! There is no music in the rarest sounds compared with these three syllables, which drop from the Redeemer's lips like sweet-smelling myrrh. "Beloved!" If he had addressed but that one word to any one of us, it might create a heaven within our soul, which neither sickness nor death could mar. Let me sound the note again, "BELOVED!" Doth Jesus love me? Doth he own his love? Doth he seal the fact by declaring it with his own lips? Then I will not stipulate for promises, nor make demands of him. If he loves he must act towards me with lovingkindness; he will not smite his beloved unless love dictates the blow; he will not forsake his chosen, for he never changes. Oh, the inexpressible, the heaped-up blessednesses which belong to the man who feels in his soul that Christ has called him *beloved*!

Here, then, you have the character in the text of those who are invited to commune with Christ; he calls his friends and his beloved. The *provisions* presented to them are of two kinds; they are bidden to *eat* and to *drink*. You, who are spiritual, know what the food is, and what the drink is, for you eat his flesh and drink his blood. The incarnation of the Son of God, and the death of Jesus the Saviour, these are the two sacred viands whereon faith is sustained. To feed upon the very Christ of God is what is needed, nothing but this can satisfy the hunger of the spirit; but he who feeds on him shall know no lack. "Eat," saith he, "and drink." You ask, "Where are the provisions?" I answer, they are contained in the first words of the text, "I am come." If *he* is come, then eat; if *he* is come, then drink; there is food, there is drink for you in him.

Note that delightful word, *abundantly*. Some dainties satiate, and even nauseate when we have too much of them, but no soul ever had too much of the dear love of Christ, no heart did ever complain that his sweetness cloyed. That can never be. Some things, if you have too much of them, may injure you, they are good to a certain point, beyond that, evil; but even the smallest child of grace shall never over-feast himself with Jesus' love. No, the more ye have the more shall ye enjoy, the more blessed shall ye be, and the

more shall ye be like the Lord from whom the love proceeds. O ye that stand shivering in the cold shallows of the river of life, why tarry ye there? Descend into the greater depths, the warmer waves, and let the mighty stream lave you breast-high; yea, go farther, plunge where you can find no bottom, for it is blessed and safe swimming in the stream of Christ's everlasting love, and he invites you to it now. When you are at his banquet-table, pick not here and there a crumb, sip not now and then a drop: he saith, "eat," and he adds, "drink abundantly," and the invitation to receive abundantly applies to both refreshments. Your eating and your drinking may be without stint. Ye cannot impoverish the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. When ye are satiated with his love, his table shall still be loaded. Your cups may run over, but his flagons will still be brimmed. If you are straitened at all you are not straitened in him, you are straitened in yourselves.

But now let me say to my brethren, and especially to my fellow workers in the kingdom of Christ, it is for us just now while our Lord is walking in his garden, while he is finding satisfaction in his work and in his people, to beware of taking any satisfaction in the work ourselves, and equally to beware that we do not neglect the appropriate duty of the occasion, namely, that of feasting our souls with our Lord's gracious provisions. You are caring for others, it is well; you are rejoicing over others, it is well; still watch well yourselves, and rejoice in the Lord in your own hearts. What said he to the twelve when they came back glorying that even the devils were subject unto them? Did he not reply, "Nevertheless rejoice not in this, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven"? It is your personal interest in Christ, you being yourself saved, Christ being present with you, that is your main joy. Enjoy the feast for yourselves, or you will not be strong to hand out the living bread to others. See that you are first partakers of the fruit, or you will not labour aright as God's husbandmen. The more of personal enjoyment you allow yourself in connection with your Lord, the more strong will you be for his service, and the more out of an experimental sense of his preciousness will you be able to say with true eloquence, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." You will tell others what you have tasted and handled; you will say, "'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him from all his fears.'" I put this before you with much earnestness, and I pray that none of you may think it safe so to work as to forget to commune, or wise to seek the good of others so as to miss personal fellowship with the Redeemer.

I might now conclude, but it strikes me that there may be some among us who are, in their own apprehensions, outside the garden of Christ's church, and are therefore mourning over this sermon, and saying, "Alas! that is not for me. Christ is come into his garden, but I am a piece of waste ground. He is fed and satisfied in his church, but he finds nothing in me. Surely I shall perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little!" I know how apt poor hearts are to write bitter things against themselves, even when God has never written a single word against them; so let me see if by turning over this text we may not find thoughts of consolation for the trembling ones. Who

knows? There may be a soft breath in the text which may fan the smoking flax, a tender hand that may bind up the bruised reed. I will briefly indicate two or three comfortable thoughts.

Seeking soul, should it not console thee to think that *Jesus is near*? The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you, for he is come into his garden. He was in our last meeting for anxious souls, for many found him there. You are not, then, living in a region where Christ is absent, mayhap when he passeth by he will look on you. Canst thou not put out thy finger and touch the hem of his garment, for Jesus of Nazareth passeth by? Even if thou hast not touched him, yet it should give thee some good cheer to know that he is within reach, and within call. Though thou be like the poor withered lily in the garden, or worse still, like a noxious weed, yet if he be in the garden he may observe thee and have pity on thee.

Notice, too, that although the text speaks of a garden, it never was a garden till he made it so. Men do not find gardens in the wilderness. In the wilds of Australia or the backwoods of America, men never stumble on a garden where human foot hath never been, it is all forest, or prairie, or mountain; so, mark thee, soul, if the church be a garden, Christ made it so. Why cannot he make thee so? Why not, indeed? Has he not said, "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off"? This garden-making gives God a name, Jesus gets honour by ploughing up the wastes, extracting the briars, and planting firs and myrtles there. See, then, there is hope for thee yet, thou barren heart, he may yet come and make thy wilderness like Eden, and thy desert like the garden of the Lord.

Note, too, that the Bridegroom gathered myrrh, and fed on milk, and wine, and honey. Ay, and I know you thought, "He will find no honey in me, he will find no milk and wine in me." Ah! but then the text did not say he found them in the church; it is said, "I have eaten *my* noneycomb with *my* honey; I have drunk *my* wine with *my* milk;" and if he put those things into his church, and then took comfort in them, why not put them into you, and take comfort in you too? Be of good cheer; arise, he calleth thee, this morning.

Another word perhaps may help you. Did you notice, poor hungry soul, how Jesus said, "drink *abundantly*"? "Ah," say you, "he did not say that to me." I know it. He said that to his friends and to his beloved, and you dare not put yourselves among those; but do not you see how generous he is to his friends, and how he stints nothing? He evidently does not mean to lock anything up in the store-room, for he tells them to eat and drink abundantly. Now, surely, where there is such a festival, though you dare not come and sit at the table with the guests, you might say with the Syrophenician woman, "Yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." It is good knocking at a door where they are keeping open house, and where the feast reveals a lavish hospitality. Do thou knock now and try it. If it were a poor man's dinner with a dry crust and a poor herring, or if it were a miser's meal spread most begrudgingly, I would not advise you to knock; but where there is wine and milk in rivers, and

the good man of the house bids his guests eat and drink abundantly, I say knock, for God saith it shall be opened.

Another thought. Jesus finds meat and drink in his church, and you are afraid he would find neither in you—I want to tell you a truth which, perhaps, you have forgotten. There was a woman that was a sinner; she had had five husbands, and he with whom she then lived was not her husband, she was an adulteress and a Samaritan; but Christ said, after he had conversed with her, that he had found meat to eat that his disciples knew not of. Where did he get it then? If he had drank that day, he did not get it from Jacob's well; for he had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep. He found his refreshment in that poor woman, to whom he said, "Give me to drink." The Samaritan harlot refreshed the soul of Jesus, when she believed in him and owned him as the Christ. Have you never read that word of his, "My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work"? And what is the will of him that sent him? Well, I will tell you what it is not. "It is not the will of your Father, that is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The will of God and the will of Christ are these, to save sinners; for this purpose was Jesus born and sent into the world: he came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. See, then, poor lost one, in saving thee Christ will find both meat and drink. I trust, therefore, thou wilt look to him and cry to him, and cast thyself upon him, and thou shalt never, as long as thou livest, have any cause for regretting it.

Finally, the text represents the Lord saying, "I am come into my garden." It may imply that he is not always in his garden. Sometimes his church grieves him, and his manifest presence departs; but harken, O sinner, there is a precious thought for thee: he is not always in his garden; but *he is always on the throne of grace*. He does not always say, "I am come into my garden," but he always says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He never leaves the merey-seat, he never ceases to intercede for sinners. Come, and welcome, then. If you have not seen the Beloved's face, come and bow at his feet. Though you have never heard him say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," yet come now with a broken and a contrite heart and seek absolution at his hands. Come, and welcome! Come, and welcome! May the sweet bridegroom with cords of love draw thee, and may this morning be a time of love; and as he passes by, if he sees thee weltering in thy blood, may he say unto thee, "Live!"

May the Lord grant it, and on his head shall be many crowns. Amen.