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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Song of Solomon

All *scripture*, we are sure, *is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable* for the support and advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men, and it is never the less so for there being found in it some things *dark and hard to be understood, which those that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction*. In our belief both of the divine extraction and of the spiritual exposition of this book we are confirmed by the ancient, constant, and concurring testimony both of the church of the Jews, to whom were *committed the oracles of God*, and who never made any doubt of the authority of this book, and of the Christian church, which happily succeeds them in that trust and honour. I. It must be confessed, on the one hand, that if he who barely reads this book be asked, as the eunuch was *Understandest thou what thou readeest?* he will have more reason than he had to say, *How can I, except some man shall guide me?* The books of scripture-history and prophecy are very much like one another, but this *Song of Solomon's* is very much unlike the songs of his father David; here is not the name of God in it; it is never quoted in the New Testament; we find not in it any expressions of natural religion or pious devotion, no, nor is it introduced by vision, or any of the marks of immediate revelation. It seems as hard as any part of scripture to be made a *savour of life unto life*, nay, and to those who come to the reading of it with carnal minds and corrupt affections, it is in danger of being made a *savour of death unto death*; it is a flower out of which they extract poison; and therefore the Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read it till they were thirty years old, lest by the abuse of that which is most pure and sacred (*horrendum dictu—horrible to say!*) the flames of lust should be kindled with fire from heaven, which is intended for the altar only. But, II. It must be confessed, on the other hand, that with the help of the many faithful guides we have for the understanding of this book it appears to be a very bright and powerful ray of heavenly light, admirable fitted to excite pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires towards God, to increase their delight in him, and improve their acquaintance and communion with him. It is an allegory, the letter of which kills those who rest in that and look no further, but the spirit of which gives life, 2 Co. 3:6; Jn. 6:63. It is a parable, which makes divine things more difficult to those who do not love them, but more plain and pleasant to those who do, Mt. 13:14, 16. Experienced Christians here find a counterpart of their experiences, and to them it is intelligible, while *those* neither understand it nor relish it who have no part nor lot in the matter. It is a son, an *Epithalamium*, or nuptial song, wherein, by the expressions of love between a bridegroom and his bride, are set forth and illustrated the mutual affections that pass between God and a distinguished remnant of mankind. It is a pastoral; the bride and bridegroom, for the more lively representation of humility and innocence, are brought in as a shepherd and his shepherdess. Now, 1. This song might easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Jewish church, for whose use it was first composed, and was so taken, as appears by the Chaldee-Paraphrase and the most ancient Jewish expositors. God betrothed the people of Israel to himself; he entered into covenant with them, and it was a marriage-covenant. He had given abundant proofs of his love to them, and required of them that they should love him with all their heart and soul. Idolatry was often spoken of

as spiritual adultery, and doting upon idols, to prevent which this song was penned, representing the complacency which God took in Israel and which Israel ought to take in God, and encouraging them to continue faithful to him, though he might seem sometimes to withdraw and hide himself from them, and to wait for the further manifestation of himself in the promised Messiah. 2. It may more easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Christian church, because the condescensions and communications of divine love appear more rich and free under the gospel than they did under the law, and the communion between heaven and earth more familiar. God sometimes spoke of himself as the husband of the Jewish church (Isa. 64:5, Hos. 2:16, 19), and rejoiced in it as his bride, Isa. 62:4, 5. But more frequently is Christ represented as the bridegroom of his church (Mt. 25:1; Rom. 7:4; 2 Co. 11:2; Eph. 5:32), and the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9. Pursuant to this metaphor Christ and the church in general, Christ and particular believers, are here discoursing with abundance of mutual esteem and endearment. The best key to this book is the 45th Psalm, which we find applied to Christ in the New Testament, and therefore this ought to be so too. It requires some pains to find out what may, probably, be the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the several parts of this book; as David's songs are many of them level to the capacity of the meanest, and there are shallows in them learned, and there are depths in it in which an elephant may swim. But, when the meaning is found out, it will be of admirable use to excite pious and devout affections in us; and the same truths which are plainly laid down in other scriptures when they are extracted out of this come to the soul with a more pleasing power. When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, *put off our shoe from off our foot*, and even forget that we have bodies, because *the place where we stand is holy ground*, but we must, with John, *come up hither*, must spread our wings, take a noble flight, and soar upwards, till by faith and holy love we *enter into the holiest*, for *this is no other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven*.

Chapter 1

In this chapter, after the title of the book (v. 1), we have Christ and his church, Christ and a believer, expressing their esteem for each other. I. The bride, the church, speaks to the bridegroom (v. 2-4), to the daughters of Jerusalem (v. 5, 6), and then to the bridegroom (v. 7). II. Christ, the bridegroom, speaks in answer to the complaints and requests of his spouse (v. 8-11). III. The church expresses the great value she has for Christ, and the delights she takes in communion with him (v. 12-14). IV. Christ commends the church's beauty (v. 15). V. The church returns the commendation (v. 16, 17). Where there is a fire of true love to Christ in the heart this will be of use to blow it up into a flame.

Verse 1

We have here the title of this book, showing, 1. The nature of it; it is a *song*, that it might the better answer the intention, which is to stir up the affections and to heat them, which poetry will be very instrumental to do. The subject is pleasing, and therefore fit to be treated of in a song, in singing which we may *make melody with our hearts unto the Lord*. It is evangelical; and gospel-times should be times of joy, for gospel-grace puts a *new song* into our mouths, Ps. 98:1. 2. The dignity of it; it is *the song of songs*, a most excellent song, not only above any human composition, or above all other songs which Solomon penned, but even above any other of the scripture-songs, as having more of Christ in it. 3. The penman of it; it is Solomon's. It is not the song of fools, as many of the songs of love are, but the song of the wisest of men; nor can any man give a better proof of his wisdom than to celebrate the love of God to mankind and to excite his own love to God and that of others with it. Solomon's songs were a thousand and five (1 Ki. 4:32); those that were of other subjects are lost, but this of seraphic love remains, and will to the end of time. Solomon, like his father, was addicted to poetry, and, which way soever a man's genius lies, he should endeavor to honour God and edify the church with it. One of Solomon's names was *Jedidiah—beloved of the Lord* (2 Sa. 12:25); and none so fit to write of the Lord's love as he that had himself so great an interest in it; none of all the apostles wrote so much of love as he that was himself the beloved disciple and lay in Christ's bosom. Solomon, as a king, had great affairs to mind and manage, which took up much of his thoughts and time, yet he found heart and leisure for this and other religious exercises. Men of business ought to be devout men, and not to think that business will excuse them from that which is every man's great business—to keep up communion with God. It is not certain when Solomon penned this sacred song. Some think that he penned it after he recovered himself by the grace of God from his backslidings, as a further proof of his repentance, and as if by doing good to many with this song he would atone for the hurt he had perhaps done with loose, vain, amorous songs, when he *loved many strange wives*; now he turned his wit the right way. It is more probable that he penned it in the beginning of his time, while he kept close to God and kept up his communion with him; and perhaps he put this song, with his father's psalms, into the hands of the chief musician, for the service of the temple, not without a key to it, for the right understanding of it. Some think that it was penned upon occasion of his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, but that is uncertain; the tower of Lebanon, which is mentioned in this book (ch. 7:4), was not built, as is supposed, till long after the marriage. We may reasonably think that when in the height of his prosperity he *loved the Lord* (1 Ki. 3:3) he thus *served him*

with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things. It may be rendered, *The song of songs, which is concerning Solomon*, who as the son and successor of David, on whom the covenant of royalty was entailed, as the founder of the temple, and as one that excelled in wisdom and wealth, was a type of Christ, in whom are *hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and yet is a greater than Solomon; this is therefore a song concerning him. It is here fitly placed after *Ecclesiastes*; for when by the book we are thoroughly convinced of the vanity of the creature, and its insufficiency to satisfy us and make a happiness for us, we shall be quickened to seek for happiness in the love of Christ, and that true transcendent pleasure which is to be found only in communion with God through him. The voice in the wilderness, that was to prepare Christ's way, cried, *All flesh is grass*.

Verses 2-6

The spouse, in this dramatic poem, is here first introduced addressing herself to the bridegroom and then to the daughters of Jerusalem.

I. To the bridegroom, not giving him any name or title, but beginning abruptly: *Let him kiss me*; like Mary Magdalen to the supposed gardener (Jn. 20:15), *If thou have borne him hence*, meaning Christ, but not naming him. The heart has been before taken up with the thoughts of him, and to this relative those thoughts were the antecedent, that good matter which the heart was inditing, Ps. 45:1. Those that are full of Christ themselves are ready to think that others should be so too. Two things the spouse desires, and pleases herself with the thoughts of:—

1. The bridegroom's friendship (v. 2): *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, that is, be reconciled to me, and let me know that he is so; let me have the token of his favour." Thus the Old-Testament church desired Christ's manifesting himself in the flesh, to be no longer under the law as a schoolmaster, under a dispensation of bondage and terror, but to receive the communications of divine grace in the gospel, in which God is reconciling the world unto himself, binding up and healing what by the law was torn and smitten; as the mother kisses the child that she has chidden. "Let him no longer send to me, but come himself, no longer speak by angels and prophets, but let me have the word of his own mouth, those *gracious words* (Lu. 4:22), which will be to me as the *kisses of the mouth*, sure tokens of reconciliation, as Esau's kissing Jacob was." All gospel duty is summed up in our kissing the Son (Ps. 2:12); so all gospel-grace is summed up in his kissing us, as the father of the prodigal kissed him when he returned a penitent. It is a kiss of peace. Kisses are opposed to wounds (Prov. 27:6), so are the kisses of grace to the wounds of the law. Thus all true believers earnestly desire the manifestations of Christ's love to their souls; they desire no more to make them happy than the assurance of his favour, the lifting up of the light of his countenance upon them (Ps. 4:6, 7), and the knowledge of that love of his which surpasses knowledge; this is the one thing they desire, Ps. 27:4. They are ready to welcome the manifestation of Christ's love to their souls by his Spirit, and to return them in the humble professions of love to him and complacency in him, above all. *The fruit of his lips is peace*, Isa. 57:19. "Let him give me ten thousand kisses whose very fruition makes me desire him more, and, whereas all other pleasures sour and wither by using, those of the Spirit become more delightful." So bishop Reynolds. She gives several reasons for this desire. (1.) Because of the great esteem she has for his love: *Thy love is better than wine*. *Wine makes glad the heart*, revives the drooping spirits, and

exhilarates them, but gracious souls take more pleasure in loving Christ and being beloved of him, in the fruits and gifts of his love and in the pledges and assurances of it, than any man ever took in the most exquisite delights of sense, and it is more reviving to them than ever the richest cordial was to one ready to faint. Note, [1.] Christ's love is in itself, and in the account of all the saints, more valuable and desirable than the best entertainments this world can give. [2.] Those only may expect the kisses of Christ's mouth, and the comfortable tokens of his favour, who prefer his love before all delights of the children of men, who would rather forego those delights than forfeit his favour, and take more pleasure in spiritual joys than in any bodily refreshments whatsoever. Observe here the change of the person: *Let him kiss me*; there she speaks of him as absent, or as if she were afraid to speak to him; but, in the next words, she sees him near at hand, and therefore directs her speech to him: "*Thy love, thy loves*" (so the word is), "I so earnestly desire, because I highly esteem it." (2.) Because of the diffuse fragrantcy of his love and the fruits of it (v. 3): "*Because of the savour of thy good ointment* (the agreeableness and acceptableness of thy graces and comforts to all that rightly understand both them and themselves), *thy name is as ointment poured forth*, thou art so, and all that whereby thou hast made thyself known; thy very name is precious to all the saints; it is an ointment and perfume which rejoice the heart." The unfolding of Christ's name is as the opening of a box of precious ointment, which the room is filled with the odour of. The preaching of his gospel was the *manifesting the savour of his knowledge in every place*, 2 Co. 2:14. The Spirit was the *oil of gladness* wherewith Christ was anointed (Heb. 1:9), and all true believers have that *unction* (1 Jn. 2:27), so that he is precious to them, and they to him and to one another. *A good name is as precious ointment*, but Christ's name is more fragrant than any other. Wisdom, like oil, *makes the face to shine*; but the Redeemer outshines, in beauty, all others. The name of Christ is not now like ointment sealed up, as it had been long (*Ask not after my name, for it is secret*), but like *ointment poured forth*, which denotes both the freeness and fulness of the communications of his grace by the gospel. (3.) Because of the general affection that all holy souls have to him: *Therefore do the virgins love thee*. It is *Christ's love shed abroad in our hearts* that draws them out in love to him; all that are pure from the corruptions of sin, that preserve the chastity of their own spirits, and are true to the vows by which they have devoted themselves to God, that not only suffer not their affections to be violated but cannot bear so much as to be solicited by the world and the flesh, those are the virgins that love Jesus Christ and *follow him whithersoever he goes*, Rev. 14:4. And, because Christ is the darling of all the *pure in heart*, let him be ours, and let our desires be towards him and towards the *kisses of his mouth*.

2. The bridegroom's fellowship, v. 4. Observe here,

(1.) Her petition for divine grace: *Draw me*. This implies sense of distance from him, desire of union with him. "Draw me to thyself, draw me nearer, draw me home to thee." She had prayed that he would draw nigh to her (v. 2); in order to that, she prays that he would draw her nigh to him. "*Draw me*, not only with the moral suasion which there is in the fragrantcy of the good ointments, not only with the attractives of that name which is as ointment poured forth, but with supernatural grace, with the *cords of a man* and the *bands of love*," Hos. 11:4. Christ has told us that none come to him but such as the Father draws, Jn. 6:44. We are not only weak, and cannot come of ourselves any further than we are helped, but we are naturally backward and averse to come, and therefore must pray for those influences and operations of the Spirit, by the power of which we are

unwilling made willing, Ps. 110:3. "*Draw me*, else I move not; overpower the world and the flesh that would draw me from thee." We are not driven to Christ, but drawn in such a way as is agreeable to rational creatures.

(2.) Her promise to improve that grace: *Draw me*, and then *we will run after thee*. See how the doctrine of special and effectual grace consists with our duty, and is a powerful engagement and encouragement to it, and yet reserves all the glory of all the good that is in us to God only. Observe, [1.] The flowing forth of the soul after Christ, and its ready compliance with him, are the effect of his grace; we could not run after him if he did not draw us, 2 Co. 3:5; Phil. 4:13. [2.] The grace which God gives us we must diligently improve. When Christ by his Spirit draws us we must with our spirits run after him. As God says, *I will, and you shall* (Eze. 36:27), so we must say, "*Thou shalt and we will; thou shalt work in us both to will and to do, and therefore we will work out our own salvation*" (Phil. 2:12, 13); not only we will walk, but we will run after thee, which denotes eagerness of desire, readiness of affection, vigour of pursuit, and swiftness of motion. *When thou shalt enlarge my heart then I will run the way of thy commandments* (Ps. 119:32); when *thy right hand upholds me then my soul follows hard after thee* (Ps. 63:8); when with lovingkindness to us he draws us (Jer. 31:3) we with lovingkindness to him must run after him, Isa. 40:31. Observe the difference between the petition and the promise: "Draw me, and then we will run." When Christ pours out his Spirit upon the church in general, which is his bride, all the members of it do thence receive enlivening quickening influences, and are made to run to him with the more cheerfulness, Isa. 55:5. Or, "Draw me" (says the believing soul) "and then I will not only follow thee myself as fast as I can, but will bring all mine along with me: *We will run after thee*, I and the *virgins that love thee* (v. 3), I and all that I have any interest in or influence upon, *I and my house* (Jos. 24:15), I and the *transgressors whom I will teach thy ways*," Ps. 51:13. Those that put themselves forth, in compliance with divine grace, shall find that their *zeal will provoke many*, 2 Co. 9:2. Those that are lively will be active; when Philip was drawn to Christ he drew Nathanael; and they will be exemplary, and so will win those that would not be won by the word.

(3.) The immediate answer that was given to this prayer: *The King has drawn me, has brought me into his chambers*. It is not so much an answer fetched by faith from the world of Christ's grace as an answer fetched by experience from the workings of his grace. If we observe, as we ought, the returns of prayer, we may find that sometimes, *while we are yet speaking*, Christ hears, Isa. 65:24. The bridegroom is a king; so much the more wonderful is his condescension in the invitations and entertainments that he gives us, and so much the greater reason have we to accept of them and to *run after him*. God is the King that has made the *marriage-supper* for his Son (Mt. 22:2) and brings in even *the poor and the maimed*, and even the most shy and bashful are *compelled to come in*. Those that are drawn to Christ are brought, not only into his courts, into his palaces (Ps. 45:15), but into his presence-chamber, where his secret is with them (Jn. 14:21), and where they are safe in his pavilion, Ps. 27:5; Isa. 26:20. Those that *wait at wisdom's gates* shall be *made to come* (so the word is) *into her chambers*; they shall be led into truth and comfort.

(4.) The wonderful complacency which the spouse takes in the honour which the king put upon her. Being *brought into the chamber*, [1.] "We have what we would have. Our desires are crowned with unspeakable delights; all our griefs vanish, and *we will be glad and rejoice*. If a day in the courts, much more an hour in the chambers, *is better than a thousand*, than ten

thousand, elsewhere." Those that are, through grace, brought into covenant and communion with God, have reason to *go on their way rejoicing*, as the eunuch (Acts 8:39), and that joy will enlarge our hearts and be our strength, Neh. 8:10. [2.] All our joy shall centre in God: "*We will rejoice*, not in the ointments, or the chambers, but *in thee*. It is God only that is our *exceeding joy*, Ps. 43:4. We have no joy but in Christ, and which we are indebted to him for." *Gaudium in Domino—Joy in the Lord*, was the ancient salutation, and *Salus in Domino sempiterna—Eternal salvation in the Lord*. [3.] "We will retain the relish and savour of this kindness of thine and never forget it: *We will remember thy loves more than wine*; no only thy love itself (v. 2), but the very remembrance of it shall be more grateful to us than the strongest cordial to the spirits, or the most palatable liquor to the taste. We will remember to give thanks for thy love, and it shall make more durable impressions upon us than any thing in this world."

(5.) The communion which a gracious soul has with all the saints in this communion with Christ. In the chambers to which we are brought we not only meet with him, but meet with one another (1 Jn. 1:7); for *the upright love thee*; the congregation, the generation, of the *upright love thee*. Whatever others do, all that are Israelites indeed, and faithful to God, will love Jesus Christ. Whatever differences of apprehension and affection there may be among Christians in other things, this they are all agreed in, Jesus Christ is precious to them. *The upright* here are the same with the *virgins*, v. 3. All that *remember his love more than wine* will love him with a superlative love. Nor is any love acceptable to Christ but the love of *the upright*, love in sincerity, Eph. 6:24.

II. To *the daughters of Jerusalem*, v. 5, 6. The church in general, being in distress, speaks to particular churches to guard them against the danger they were in of being offended at the church's sufferings, 1 Th. 3:3. Or the believer speaks to those that were professors at large in the church, but not of it, or to weak Christians, babes in Christ, that labour under much ignorance, infirmity, and mistake, not perfectly instructed, and yet willing to be taught in the things of God. She observed these bystanders look disdainfully upon her because of her blackness, in respect both of sins and sufferings, upon the account of which they thought she had little reason to expect the kisses she wished for (v. 2) or to expect that they should join with her in her joys, v. 4. She therefore endeavors to remove this offence; she owns she is *black*. Guilt blackens; the heresies, scandals, and offences, that happen in the church, make her *black*; and the best saints have their failings. Sorrow blackens; that seems to be especially meant; the church is often in a low condition, mean, and poor, and in appearance despicable, her beauty sullied and her face foul with weeping; she is in mourning weeds, clothed with sackcloth, as the Nazarites that had become *blacker than a coal*, Lam. 4:8. Now, to take off this offence,

1. She asserts her own comeliness notwithstanding (v. 5): *I am black, but comely*, black as *the tents of Kedar*, in which the shepherds lived, which were very coarse, and never whitened, weather-beaten and discoloured by long use, but comely as *the curtains of Solomon*, the furniture of whose rooms, no doubt, was sumptuous and rich, in proportion to the stateliness of his houses. The church is sometimes *black* with persecution, *but comely* in patience, constancy, and consolation, and never the less amiable in the eyes of Christ, *black in the account of men, but comely* in God's esteem, *black* in some that are a scandal to her, *but comely* in others that are sincere and are an honour to her. True believers are *black* in themselves, *but comely* in Christ,

with the comeliness that he puts upon them, *black* outwardly, for *the world knows them not*, but *all glorious within*, Ps. 45:13. St. Paul was *weak*, and yet *strong*, 2 Co. 12:10. And so the church is *black* and yet *comely*; a believer is a sinner and yet a saint; his own righteousnesses are *as filthy rags*, but he is clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. The Chaldee Paraphrase applies it to the people of Israel's blackness when they made the golden calf and their comeliness when they repented of it.

2. She gives an account how she came to be so black. The blackness was not natural, but contracted, and was owing to the hard usage that had been given her: *Look not upon me so scornfully because I am black*. We must take heed with what eye we look upon the church, especially when she is in black. *Thou shouldst not have looked upon the day of thy brother*, the day of his affliction, Obad. 12. Be not offended; for,

(1.) *I am black* by reason of my sufferings: *The sun has looked upon me*. She was fair and comely; whiteness was her proper colour; but she got this blackness by *the burden and heat of the day*, which she was forced to bear. She was sun-burnt, scorched with tribulation and persecution (Mt. 13:6, 21); and the greatest beauties, if exposed to the weather, are soonest tanned. Observe how she mitigates her troubles; she does not say, as Jacob (Gen. 31:40), *In the day the drought consumed me*, but, *The sun has looked upon me*; for it becomes not God's suffering people to make the worst of their sufferings. But what was the matter? [1.] She fell under the displeasure of those of her own house: *My mother's children were angry with me*. She was *in perils by false brethren*; her foes were *those of her own house* (Mt. 10:36), brethren by nature as men, by profession as members of the same sacred corporation, the children of the church her mother, but not of God her Father; they *were angry with her*. The Samaritans, who claimed kindred to the Jews, were vexed at any thing that tended to the prosperity of Jerusalem, Neh. 2:10. Note, It is no new thing for the people of God to fall under the anger of their own mother's children. *It was thou, a man, my equal*, Ps. 55:12, 13. This makes the trouble the more irksome and grievous; from such it is taken unkindly, and the anger of such is implacable. *A brother offended is hard to be won*. [2.] They dealt very hardly with her: *They made me the keeper of the vineyards*, that is, *First*, "They seduced me to sin, drew me into false worships, to serve their gods, which was like dressing the vineyards, *keeping the vine of Sodom*; and they would not let me *keep my own vineyard*, serve my own God, and observe those pure worships which he gave me in charge, and which I do and ever will own for mine." These are grievances which good people complain most of in a time of persecution, that their consciences are forced, and that those who rule them with rigour say *to their souls*, *Bow down, that we may go over*, Isa. 51:23. Or, *Secondly*, "They brought me into trouble, imposed that upon me which was toilsome, and burdensome, and very disgraceful." Keeping the vineyards was base servile work, and very laborious, Isa. 61:5. Her mother's children made her the drudge of the family. *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel*. The spouse of Christ has met with a great deal of hard usage.

(2.) "My sufferings are such as I have deserved; for *my own vineyard have I not kept*. How unrighteous soever my brethren are in persecuting me, God is righteous in permitting them to do so. I am justly made a slavish keeper of men's vineyards, because I have been a careless keeper of the vineyards God has entrusted me with." Slothful servants of God are justly made to serve their enemies, *that they may know his service, and the service of the kings of the countries*, 2 Chr. 12:8; Deu. 28:47, 48; Eze.

20:23, 24. "Think not the worse of the ways of God for my sufferings, for I smart for my own folly." Note, When God's people are oppressed and persecuted it becomes them to acknowledge their own sin to be the procuring cause of their troubles, especially their carelessness in keeping their vineyards, so that it has been like *the field of the slothful*.

Verses 7-11

Here is, I. The humble petition which the spouse presents to her beloved, the shepherdess to the shepherd, the church and every believer to Christ, for a more free and intimate communion with him. She turns from the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom she had complained both of her sins and of her troubles, and looks up to heaven for relief and succour against both, v. 7. Here observe, 1. The title she gives to Christ: *O thou whom my soul loveth*. Note, It is the undoubted character of all true believers that their souls love Jesus Christ, which intimates both the sincerity and the strength of their love; they *love him with all their hearts*; and those that do so may come to him boldly and may humbly plead it with him. 2. The opinion she has of him as the good shepherd of the sheep; she doubts not but he *feeds his flock* and *makes them rest at noon*. Jesus Christ graciously provides both repast and repose for his sheep; they are not starved, but well fed, not scattered upon the mountains, but fed together, fed *in green pastures* and in the hot time of the day *led by the still waters* and made to lie down under a cool refreshing shade. Is it with God's people a noon-time of outward troubles, inward conflicts? Christ has rest for them; he *carries them in his arms*, Isa. 40:11. 3. Her request to him that she might be admitted into his society: *Tell me where thou feedest*. Those that would be told, that would be taught, what they are concerned to know and do, must apply to Jesus Christ, and beg of him to teach them, to tell them. "Tell me where to find thee, where I may have conversation with thee, *where thou feedest* and tendest thy flock, that there I may have some of my company." Observe, by the way, We should not, in love to our friends and their company, tempt them or urge them to neglect their business, but desire such an enjoyment of them as will consist with it, and rather, if we can, to join with them in their business and help to forward it. "*Tell me where thou feedest*, and there I will sit with thee, walk with thee, feed my flocks with thine, and not hinder thee nor myself, but bring my work with me." Note, Those whose souls love Jesus Christ earnestly desire to have communion with him, by his word in which he speaks to us and by prayer in which we speak to him, and to share in the privileges of his flock; and we may learn from the care he takes of his church, to provide convenient food and rest for it, how to take care of our own souls, which are our charge. 4. The plea she uses for the enforcing of this request: "*For why should I be as one that turns aside by (or after) the flocks of thy companions*, that pretend to be so, but are really thy competitors, and rivals with thee." Note, Turning aside from Christ after other lovers is that which gracious souls dread, and deprecate, more than any thing else. "Thou wouldst not have me to *turn aside*, no, nor to *be as one that turns aside*; tell me then, O tell me, where I may be near thee, and I will never leave thee." (1.) "*Why should I lie under suspicion*, and look as if I belonged to some other and not to thee? *Why should I be thought by the flocks of our companions* to be a deserter from thee, and a retainer to some other shepherd?" Good Christians will be afraid of giving any occasion to those about them to question their faith in Christ and their love to him; they would not do any thing that looks like unconcernedness about their souls; or uncharitableness towards their brethren, or that savours of indifference and disaffection to holy ordinances; and we should pray to God to direct us into and keep us in the way of our duty, that we may not so much as *seem*

to come short, Heb. 4:1. (2.) "Why should I lie in temptation to *turn aside*, as I do while I am absent from thee?" We should be earnest with God for a settled peace in communion with God through Christ, that we may not be as waifs and strays, ready to be picked up by him that next passes by.

II. The gracious answer which the bridegroom gives to this request, v. 8. See how ready God is to answer prayer, especially prayers for instruction; even while she is yet speaking, he hears. Observe, 1. How affectionately he speaks to her: *O thou fairest among women!* Note, Believing souls are fair, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, above any other. Christ sees a beauty in holiness, whether we do or no. The spouse has called herself black, but Christ calls her fair. Those that are low in their own eyes are so much the more amiable in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Blushing at their own deformity (says Mr. Durham) is a chief part of their beauty. 2. How mildly he checks her for her ignorance, in these words, *If thou know not*, intimating that she might have known it if it had not been her own fault. What! dost thou not know where to find me and my flock? Compare Christ's answer to a like address of Philip's (Jn. 14:9), *Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* But, 3. With what tenderness he acquaints her where she might find him. If men say, *Lo, here is Christ, or, Lo, he is there, believe them not, go not after them*, Mt. 24:23, 26. But, (1.) *Walk in the way of good men* (Prov. 2:20), follow the track, ask for the good old way, observe *the footsteps of the flock*, and *go forth by* them. It will not serve to sit still and cry, "Lord, show me the way," but we must bestir ourselves to enquire out the way; and we may find it by looking which way *the footsteps of the flock* lead, what has been the practice of godly people all along; let that practice be ours, Heb. 6:12; 1 Co. 11:1. (2.) Sit under the direction of good ministers: *"Feed thyself and thy kids besides the tents of the under-shepherds. Bring thy charge with thee"* (it is probable that the custom was to commit the lambs and kids to the custody of the women, the shepherdesses); "they shall all be welcome; *the shepherds* will be no hindrance to thee, as they were to Reuel's daughters (Ex. 2:17), but helpers rather, and therefore abide by their tents." Note, Those that would have acquaintance and communion with Christ must closely and conscientiously adhere to holy ordinances, must join themselves to his people and attend his ministers. Those that have the charge of families must bring them with them to religious assemblies; let their *kids*, their children, their servants, have the benefit of *the shepherds' tents*.

III. The high encomiums which the bridegroom gives of his spouse. To be *given in marriage*, in the Hebrew dialect, is to be *praised* (Ps. 78:63, margin), so this spouse is here; her *husband praises* this *virtuous woman* (Prov. 31:28); he praises her, as is usual in poems, by similitudes. 1. He calls her his *love* (v. 9); it is an endearing compellation often used in this book: "My friend, my companion, my familiar." 2. He compares her to a set of strong and stately *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*. Egypt was famous for the best horses. Solomon had his thence; and Pharaoh, no doubt, had the choicest the country afforded for his own chariots. The church had complained of her own weakness, and the danger she was in of being made a prey of by her enemies: "Fear not," says Christ; *"I have made thee like a company of horses; I have put strength into thee as I have done into the horse* (Job 39:19), so that thou shalt with a gracious boldness *mock at fear, and not be affrighted, like the lion*, Prov. 28:1. *The Lord has made thee as his goodly horse in the day of battle*, Zec. 10:3. *I have compared thee to my company of horses which triumphed over Pharaoh's chariots, the holy angels, horses of fire.*" Hab. 3:15, *Thou didst walk through the sea with thy*

horses; and see Isa. 63:13. We are weak in ourselves, but if Christ make us as horses, strong and bold, we need not fear what all the powers of darkness can do against us. 3. He admires the beauty and ornaments of her countenance (v. 10): *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels*, the attire of the head, curls of hair, or favourites (so some), or knots of ribbons; *thy neck also with chains*, such as persons of the first rank wear, *chains of gold*. The ordinances of Christ are the ornaments of the church. The graces, gifts, and comforts of the Spirit, are the adorning of every believing soul, and beautify it; these render it, *in the sight of God, of great price*. The ornaments of the saints are many, but all orderly disposed in *rows* and *chains*, in which there is a mutual connexion with and dependence upon each other. The beauty is not from any thing in themselves, from the *neck* or from the *cheeks*, but from ornaments with which they are set off. It was *comeliness which I put upon thee*, said the Lord God; for we were born not only naked, but polluted, Eze. 16:14.

IV. His gracious purpose to add to her ornaments; for where God has given true grace he will give more grace; *to him that has shall be given*. Is the church courageous in her resistance of sin, as the *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*? Is she *comely* in the exercise of grace, as *with rows of jewels* and *chains of gold*? She shall be yet further beautified (v. 11): *We will make thee borders of gold*, inlaid, or enamelled, *with studs of silver*. Whatever is wanting shall be made up, till the church and every true believer come to be *perfect in beauty*; see Eze. 16:14. This is here undertaken to be done by the concurring power of the three persons in the Godhead: *We will do it*; like that (Gen. 1:26), "*Let us make man*; so let us new-make him, and perfect his beauty." The same that is the author will be the finisher of the good work; and it cannot miscarry.

Verses 12-17

Here the conference is carried on between Christ and his spouse, and endearments are mutually exchanged.

I. Believers take a great complacency in Christ, and in communion with him. *To you that believe he is precious*, above any thing in this world, 1 Pt. 2:7. Observe,

1. The humble reverence believers have for Christ as their Sovereign, v. 12. He is a *King* in respect both of dignity and dominion; he wears the crown of honour, he bears the sceptre of power, both which are the unspeakable satisfaction of all his people. This King has his royal table spread in the gospel, in which is *made for all nations a feast of fat things*, Isa. 25:6. Wisdom has *furnished her table*, Prov. 9:1. He *sits at this table to see his guests* (Mt. 22:11), to see that nothing be wanting that is fit for them; he *sups with them* and *they with him* (Rev. 3:20); he has fellowship with them and rejoices in them; he *sits at his table* to bid them welcome, and to carve for them, as Christ *broke the five loaves* and gave to his disciples, that they might distribute to the multitude. He sits there to receive petitions, as Ahasuerus admitted Esther's petition at *the banquet of wine*. He has promised to be present with his people in his ordinances always. Then believers do him all the honour they can, and study how to express their esteem of him and gratitude to him, as Mary did when she anointed his head with *the ointment of spikenard* that was *very costly*, one pound of it worth *three hundred pence*, and so fragrant that *the house was filled with the pleasing odour of it* (Jn. 12:3), which story seems as if it were designed to refer to this passage, for Christ was then *sitting at table*. When good Christians, in any religious duty, especially in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, where the King is pleased, as it were, to *sit with us at his own table*, have their graces exercised, their hearts broken by repentance, healed by faith, and

inflamed with holy love and desires toward Christ, with joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed, then the *spikenard sends forth the smell thereof*. Christ is pleased to reckon himself honoured by it, and to accept of it as an instance of respect to him, as it was in the wise men of the east, who paid their homage to the new-born King of the Jews by presenting to him *frankincense and myrrh*. The graces of God's Spirit in the hearts of believers are exceedingly precious in themselves and pleasing to Christ, and his presence in ordinances draws them out into act and exercise. If he withdraw, graces wither and languish, as plants in the absence of the sun; if he approach, the face of the soul is renewed, as of the earth in the spring; and then it is time to bestir ourselves, that we may not lose the gleam, not lose the gale; for nothing is done acceptably but what grace does, Heb. 12:28.

2. The strong affection they have for Christ as their *beloved*, their *well-beloved*, v. 13. Christ is not only *beloved* by all believing souls, but is their *well-beloved*, their best-beloved, their only beloved; he has that place in their hearts which no rival can be admitted to, the innermost and uppermost place. Observe, (1.) How Christ is accounted of by all believers: He is *a bundle of myrrh* and *a cluster of camphire*, something, we may be sure, nay, every thing, that is pleasant and delightful. The doctrine of his gospel, and the comforts of his Spirit, are very refreshing to them, and they rest in his love; none of all the delights of sense are comparable to the spiritual pleasure they have in meditating on Christ and enjoying him. There is a complicated sweetness in Christ and an abundance of it; there is *a bundle of myrrh* and *a cluster of camphire*. We are not straitened in him whom there is *all fulness*. The word translated *camphire* is *copher*, the same word that signifies *atonement* or *propitiation*. Christ is *a cluster* of merit and righteousness to all believers; *therefore* he is dear to them because *he is the propitiation for their sins*. Observe what stress the spouse lays upon the application: He *is unto me*, and again *unto me*, all that is sweet; whatever he is to others, he is so *to me*. He *loved me, and gave himself for me*. He *is my Lord, and my God*. (2.) How he is accepted: *He shall lie all night between my breasts*, near my heart. Christ lays the beloved disciples in his bosom; why then should not they lay their beloved Saviour in their bosoms? Why should not they embrace him with both arms, and hold him fast, with a resolution never to let him go? Christ must *dwell in the heart* (Eph. 3:17), and, in order to that, the adulteries must be put from *between the breasts* (Hos. 2:2), no pretender must have his place in the soul. He shall be as *a bundle of myrrh*, or perfume bag, between *my breasts*, always sweet to me; or his effigies in miniature, his love-tokens, shall be hung between *my breasts*, according to the custom of those that are dear to each other. He shall not only be laid their for a while, but shall lie there, shall abide there.

II. Jesus Christ has a great complacency in his church and in every true believer; they are amiable in his eyes (v. 15): *Behold, thou art fair, my love*; and again, *Behold, thou art fair*. He says this, not to make her proud (humility is one principal ingredient in spiritual beauty), but, 1. To show that there is a real beauty in holiness, that all who are sanctified are thereby beautified; they are truly fair. 2. That he takes great delight in that good work which his grace has wrought on the souls of believers; so that though they have their infirmities, whatever they think of themselves, and the world thinks of them, he thinks them fair. He calls them friends. The *hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, is in the sight of God of great price*, 1 Pt. 3:4. 3. To comfort weak believers, who are discouraged by their own blackness; let them be told again and again that they are

fair. 4. To engage all who are sanctified to be very thankful for that grace which has made them fair, who by nature were deformed, and changed the Ethiopian's skin. One instance of the beauty of the spouse is here mentioned, that she *has doves' eyes*, as ch. 4:1. Those are fair, in Christ's account, who have, not the piercing eye of the eagle, but the pure and chaste eye of the *dove*, not like the hawk, who, when he soars upwards, still has his eye upon the prey on earth, but a humble modest eye, such an eye as discovers a simplicity and godly sincerity and a dove-like innocency, eyes enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, that blessed Dove, weeping eyes. I did *mourn as a dove*, Eze. 7:16.

III. The church expresses her value for Christ, and returns esteem (v. 16): *Behold, thou art fair*. See how Christ and believers praise one another. Israel saith of God, *Who is like thee?* Ex. 15:11. And God saith of Israel, *Who is like thee?* Deu. 33:29. Lord, saith the church, "Dost thou call me *fair*? No; if we speak of strength, *thou art strong* (Job 9:19), so, if of beauty, *thou art fair*. I am fair no otherwise than as I have thy image stamped upon me. Thou art the great Original; I am but a faint and imperfect copy, I am but thy *umbra—the shadow of thee*, Jn. 1:16; 3:34. Thou art fair in thyself and (which is more) *pleasant* to all that are thine. Many are fair enough to look at, and yet the sourness of their temper renders them unpleasant; but *thou art fair, yea, pleasant*." Christ is pleasant, as he is ours, in covenant with us, in relation to us. "Thou art pleasant now, when the *King sits at his table*." Christ is always precious to believers, but in a special manner pleasant when they are admitted into communion with him, when they hear his voice, and see his face, and taste his love. *It is good to be here*. Having expressed her esteem of her husband's person, she next, like a loving spouse, that is transported with joy for having disposed of herself so well, applauds the accommodations he had for her entertainment, his *bed*, his *house*, his *rafters* or *galleries* (v. 16), which may be fitly applied to those holy ordinances in which believers have fellowship with Jesus Christ, receive the tokens of his love and return their pious and devout affections to him, increase their acquaintance with him and improve their advantages by him. Now, 1. These she calls *ours*, Christ and believers having a joint-interest in them. As husband and wife are *heirs together* (1 Pt. 3:7), so believers are *joint-heirs with Christ*, Rom. 8:17. They are his institutions and their privileges; in them Christ and believers meet. She does not call them *mine*, for a believer will own nothing as his but what Christ shall have an interest in, nor *thine*, for Christ has said, *All that I have is thine*, Lu. 15:31. All is *ours* if we are Christ's. Those that can by faith lay claim to Christ may lay claim to all that is his. 2. These are the best of the kind. Does the colour of the bed, and the furniture belonging to it, help to set it off? *Our bed is green*, a colour which, in a pastoral, is preferred before any other, because it is the colour of the fields and groves where the shepherd's business and delight are. It is a refreshing colour, good for the eyes; and it denotes fruitfulness. *I am like a green olive-tree*, Ps. 52:8. We are *married to Christ, that we should bring forth unto God*, Rom. 7:4. *The beams of our house are cedar* (v. 17), which probably refers to the temple Solomon had lately built for communion between God and Israel, which was of *cedar*, a strong sort of wood, sweet, durable, and which will never rot, typifying the firmness and continuance of the church, the gospel-temple. The galleries for walking are *of fir*, or *cypress*, some sort of wood that was pleasing both to the sight and to the smell, intimating the delight which the saints take in walking with Christ and conversing with him. Every thing in the covenant of grace (on which foot all their treaties are carried on) is very firm, very fine, and very fragrant.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I. Christ speaks both concerning himself and concerning his church (v. 1, 2). II. The church speaks 1. Remembering the pleasure and satisfaction she has in communion with Christ (v. 3, 4). 2. Entertaining herself with the present tokens of his favour and taking care that nothing happen to intercept them (v. 5-7). 3. Triumphant in his approaches towards her (v. 8, 9). 4. Repeating the gracious calls he had given her to go along with him a walking, invited by the pleasures of the returning spring (v. 10–13), out of her obscurity (v. 14), and the charge he had given to the servants to destroy that which would be hurtful to his vineyard (v. 15). 5. Rejoicing in her interest in him (v. 16). 6. Longing for his arrival (v. 17). Those whose hearts are filled with love to Christ, and hope of heaven, know best what these things mean.

Verses 1-2

See here, I. What Christ is pleased to compare himself to; and he condescends very much in the comparison. He that is the Son of the Highest, the bright and morning star, calls and owns himself *the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys*, to express his presence with his people in this world, the easiness of their access to him, and the beauty and sweetness which they find in him, and to teach them to adorn themselves with him, as shepherds and shepherdesses, when they appeared gay, were decked with roses and lilies, garlands and chaplets of flowers. *The rose*, for beauty and fragrance, is the chief of flowers, and our Saviour prefers the clothing of *the lily* before that of *Solomon in all his glory*. Christ is *the rose of Sharon*, where probably the best roses grew and in most plenty, *the rose of the field* (so some), denoting that the gospel salvation is a common salvation; it lies open to all; whoever will may come and gather the rose-buds of privileges and comforts that grow in the covenant of grace. He is not a rose locked up in a garden, but all may come and receive benefit by him and comfort in him. He is a *lily* for whiteness, a *lily of the valleys* for sweetness, for those which we call so yield a strong perfume. He is a *lily of the valleys*, or *low places*, in his humiliation, exposed to injury. Humble souls see most beauty in him. Whatever he is to others, to those that are in the *valleys* he is a *lily*. He is the *rose, the lily*; there is none besides. Whatever excellence is in Christ, it is in him singularly and in the highest degree.

II. What he is pleased to compare his church to, v. 2. 1. She is *as a lily*; he himself is *the lily* (v. 1), she is *as the lily*. The beauty of believers consists in their conformity and resemblance to Jesus Christ. They are his love, and so they are as lilies, for those are made like Christ in whose hearts his *love is shed abroad*. 2. *As a lily among thorns, as a lily* compared with *thorns*. The church of Christ as far excels all other societies as a bed of roses excels a bush of thorns. *As a lily* compassed with *thorns*. The wicked, the *daughters* of this world, such as have no love to Christ, are as *thorns*, worthless and useless, good for nothing but to stop a gap; nay, they are noxious and hurtful; they came in with sin and are a fruit of the curse; they choke good seed, and hinder good fruit, and their *end is to be burned*. God's people are *as lilies among* them, scratched and torn, shaded and obscured, by them; they are dear to Christ, and yet exposed to hardships and troubles in the world; they must expect it, for they are planted *among thorns* (Eze. 2:6), but they are nevertheless dear to him; he does not overlook nor undervalue any of his lilies for their being *among thorns*, When they are *among thorns* they must still be *as lilies*, must maintain their innocency and

purity, and, though they are *among thorns*, must not be turned into *thorns*, must *not render railing for railing*, and, if they thus preserve their character, they shall be still owned as conformable to Christ. Grace in the soul is a *lily among thorns*; corruptions are *thorns in the flesh* (2 Co. 12:7), are as Canaanites to God's Israel (Jos. 23:13); but *the lily* that is now *among thorns* shall shortly be transplanted out of this wilderness into that paradise where there is no *pricking brier* nor *grieving thorn*, Eze. 28:24.

Verses 3-7

Here, I. The spouse commends her beloved and prefers him before all others: *As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood*, which perhaps does not grow so high, nor spread so wide, as some other trees, yet is useful and serviceable to man, yielding pleasant and profitable fruit, while the other trees are of little use, no, not the cedars themselves, till they are cut down, *so is my beloved among the sons*, so far does he excel them all,—all *the sons* of God, the angels (that honour was put upon him which was never designed for them, Heb. 1:4),—all *the sons* of men; he is *fairer* than them all, fairer than the choicest of them, Ps. 45:2. Name what creature you will, and you will find Christ has the pre-eminence above them all. The world is a barren tree to a soul; Christ is a fruitful one.

II. She remembers the abundant comfort she has had in communion with him: She *sat down* by him *with great delight*, as shepherds sometimes repose themselves, sometimes converse with one another, under a tree. A double advantage she found in sitting down so near the Lord Jesus:—1. A refreshing shade: *I sat down under his shadow*, to be sheltered by him from the scorching heat of the sun, to be cooled, and so to take some rest. Christ is to believers *as the shadow* of a great tree, nay, *of a great rock in a weary land*, Isa. 32:2; 25:4. When a poor soul is parched with convictions of sin and the terrors of the law, as David (Ps. 32:4), when fatigued with the troubles of this world, as Elijah when he *sat down under a juniper tree* (1 Ki. 19:4), they find that in Christ, in his name, his graces, his comforts, and his undertaking for poor sinners, which revives them and keeps them from fainting; those that *are weary and heavily laden* may find *rest* in Christ. It is not enough to pass by this *shadow*, but we must *sit down under* it (*here will I dwell, for I have desired it*); and we shall find it not like Jonah's gourd, that soon withered, and left him in a heat, both inward and outward, but like the tree of life, the leaves whereof were not only for shelter, but for the healing of the nations. We must *sit down under this shadow with delight*, must put an entire confidence in the protection of it (as Judges 9:15), and take an entire complacency in the refreshment of it. But that is not all: 2. Here is pleasing nourishing food. This tree drops its fruits to those that *sit down under its shadow*, and they are welcome to them, and will find them *sweet unto their taste*, whatever they are to others. Believers have tasted that the Lord Jesus is *gracious* (1 Pt. 2:3); his *fruits* are all the precious privileges of the new covenant, purchased by his blood and communicated by his Spirit. Promises are sweet to a believer, yea, and precepts too. *I delight in the law of God after the inward man*. Pardons are sweet, and peace of conscience is sweet, assurances of God's love, joys of the Holy Ghost, the hopes of eternal life, and the present earnest and foretastes of it are sweet, all sweet to those that have their spiritual senses exercised. If our mouths be put out of taste for the pleasure of sin, divine consolations will be *sweet to our taste, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb*.

III. She owns herself obliged to Jesus Christ for all the benefit and comfort she had in communion with him (v. 4): *"I sat down*

under the apple-tree, glad to be there, but he admitted me, nay, he pressed me, to a more intimate communion with him: Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without? He brought me to the house of wine, the place where he entertains his special friends, from lower to higher measures and degrees of comfort, from the fruit of the apple tree to the more generous fruit of the vine." To him that values the divine joys he has more shall be given. One of the rabbins by the banqueting-house understands the tabernacle of the congregation, where the interpretation of the law was given; surely we may apply it to Christian assemblies, where the gospel is preached and gospel-ordinances are administered, particularly the Lord's supper, that banquet of wine, especially to the inside of those ordinances, communion with God in them. Observe, 1. How she was introduced: "He brought me, wrought in me an inclination to draw nigh to God, helped me over my discouragements, took me by the hand, guided and led me, and gave me an access with boldness to God as a Father," Eph. 2:18. We should never have come into the banqueting-house, never have been acquainted with spiritual pleasures, if Christ had not brought us, by opening for us a new and living way and opening in us a new and living fountain. 2. How she was entertained: His banner over me was love; he brought me in with a banner displayed over my head, not as one he triumphed over, but as one he triumphed in, and whom he always caused to triumph with him and in him, 2 Co. 2:14. The gospel is compared to a banner or ensign (Isa. 11:12), and that which is represented in the banner, written in it in letters of gold, letters of blood, is love, love; and this is the entertainment in the banqueting-house. Christ is the captain of our salvation, and he enlists all his soldiers under the banner of love; in that they centre; to that they must continually have an eye, and be animated by it. The love of Christ must constrain them to fight manfully. When a city was taken the conqueror set up his standard in it. "He has conquered me with his love, overcome me with kindness, and that is the banner over me." This she speaks of as what she had formerly had experience of, and she remembers it with delight. Eaten bread must not be forgotten, but remembered with thankfulness to that God who has fed us with manna in this wilderness.

IV. She professes her strong affection and most passionate love to Jesus Christ (v. 5): *I am sick of love*, overcome, overpowered, by it. David explains this when he says (Ps. 119:20), *My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto thy judgments*, and (v. 81), *My soul faints for thy salvation*, languishing with care to make it sure and fear of coming short of it. The spouse was now absent perhaps from her beloved, waiting for his return, and cannot bear the grief of distance and delay. Oh how much better it is with the soul when it is *sick of love* to Christ than when it is surfeited with the love of this world! She cries out for cordials: "Oh stay me with flagons, or ointments, or flowers, any thing that is reviving; comfort me with apples, with the fruits of that apple-tree, Christ (v. 3), with the merit and meditation of Christ and the sense of his love to my soul." Note, Those that are *sick of love* to Christ shall not want spiritual supports, while they are yet waiting for spiritual comforts.

V. She experiences the power and tenderness of divine grace, relieving her in her present faintings, v. 6. Though he seemed to have withdrawn, yet he was even then a very present help, 1. To sustain the love-sick soul, and to keep it from fainting away: "His left hand is under my head, to bear it up, nay, as a pillow to lay it easy." David experienced God's hand upholding him then when *his soul was following hard after God* (Ps. 63:8), and Job in a state of desertion yet found that God *put strength* into him, Job 23:6. *All his saints are in his hand*, which tenderly holds their aching heads. 2. To encourage the love-sick soul to

continue waiting till he returns: "For, in the mean time, *his right hand embraces me*, and thereby gives me an unquestionable assurance of his love." Believers owe all their strength and comfort to the supporting left hand and embracing right hand of the Lord Jesus.

VI. Finding her beloved thus nigh unto her she is in great care that her communion with him be not interrupted (v. 7): *I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem*. Jerusalem, the mother of us all, charges all her daughters, the church charges all her members, the believing soul charges all its powers and faculties, the spouse charges herself and all about her, not to *stir up, or awake, her love until he please*, now that he is asleep in her arms, as she was borne up in his, v. 6. She gives them this charge *by the roes and the hinds of the field*, that is, by every thing that is amiable in their eyes, and dear to them, *as the loving hind and the pleasant roe*. "My love is to me dearer than those can be to you, and will be disturbed, like them, with a very little noise." Note, 1. Those that experience the sweetness of communion with Christ, and the sensible manifestations of his love, cannot but desire the continuance of these blessed views, these blessed visits. Pester would make tabernacles upon the holy mount, Mt. 17:4. 2. Yet Christ will, when he pleases, withdraw those extraordinary communications of himself, for he is a free-agent, and the Spirit, as *the wind, blows where and when it listeth*, and in his pleasure it becomes us to acquiesce. But, 3. Our care must be that we do nothing to provoke him to withdraw and to hide his face, that we carefully watch over our own hearts and suppress every thought that may grieve his good Spirit. Let those that have comfort be afraid of sinning it away.

Verses 8-13

The church is here pleasing herself exceedingly with the thoughts of her further communion with Christ after she has recovered from her fainting fit.

I. She rejoices in his approach, v. 8. 1. She hears him speak: "It is *the voice of my beloved*, calling me to tell me he is coming." Like one of his own sheep, she *knows his voice* before she sees him, and can easily distinguish it from the *voice of a stranger* (Jn. 10:4, 5), and, like a faithful friend of the bridegroom, she *rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice*, Jn. 3:29. With what an air of triumph and exultation does she cry out, "*It is the voice of my beloved*, it can be the voice of no other, for none besides can speak to the heart and make that burn." 2. She sees him come, sees the goings of *our God, our King*, Ps. 48:24. *Behold, he comes*. This may very well be applied to the prospect with the Old-Testament saints had of Christ's coming in the flesh. *Abraham saw his day* at a distance, *and was glad*. The nearer the time came the clearer discoveries were made of it; and those that waited for the consolation of Israel with an eye of faith saw him come, and triumphed in the sight: *Behold, he comes*; for they had heard him say (Ps. 40:7), *Lo, I come*, to which their faith here affixes its seal: *Behold, he comes* as he has promised. (1.) He comes cheerfully and with great alacrity; he comes leaping and skipping *like a roe* and *like a young hart* (v. 9), as one pleased with his own undertaking, and that had his heart upon it and his delights with the sons of men. When he came to be baptized with the baptism of blood, how was he *straitened till it was accomplished!* Lu. 12:50. (2.) He comes slighting and surmounting all the difficulties that lay in his way; he comes *leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills* (so some read it), making nothing of the discouragements he was to break through; the curse of the law, the death of the cross, must be undergone, all the powers of darkness must be grappled with, but, before the resolutions of his love, these great

mountains become plains. Whatever opposition is given at any time to the deliverance of God's church, Christ will break through it, will get over it. (3.) He comes speedily, *like a roe or a young hart*; they thought the time long (every day a year), but really he hastened; as now, so then, *surely he comes quickly; he that shall come will come, and will not tarry*. When he comes for the deliverance of his people he *flies upon a cloud*, and never stays beyond his time, which is the best time. We may apply it to particular believers, who find that even when Christ has withdrawn sensible comforts, and seems to forsake, yet it is but for a small moment, and he will soon return with everlasting loving-kindness.

II. She pleases herself with the glimpses she has of him, and the glances she has of his favour: "He *stands behind our wall*; I know he is there, for sometimes *he looks forth at the window*, or *looks in* at it, and displays *himself through the lattice*." Such was the state of the Old-Testament church while it was in expectation of the coming of the Messiah. The ceremonial law is called *a wall of partition* (Eph. 2:14), *a veil* (2 Co. 3:13); but Christ stood behind that wall. They had him near them; they had him with them, though they could not see him clearly. He that was the substance was not far off from the shadows, Col. 2:17. They saw him looking through the windows of the ceremonial institutions and smiling through those lattices; in their sacrifices and purifications Christ discovered himself to them, and gave them intimations and earnestings of his grace, both to engage and to encourage their longings for his coming. Such is our present state in comparison with what it will be at Christ's second coming. We now *see him through a glass darkly* (the body is a wall between us and him, through the windows of which we now and then get a sight of him), but not *face to face*, as we hope to see him shortly. In the sacraments Christ is near us, but it is *behind the wall* of external signs, through *those lattices* he manifests himself to us; but we shall shortly *see him as he is*. Some understand this of the state of a believer when he is under a cloud; Christ is out of sight and yet not far off. See Job 34:14, and compare Job 23:8–10. She calls the wall that interposed between her and her beloved *our wall*, because it is sin, and nothing else, that separates between us and God, and that is a wall of our own erecting (Isa. 59:1); behind that he stands, as *waiting to be gracious*, and ready to be reconciled, upon our repentance. Then *he looks in at the window*, observes the frame of our hearts and the working of our souls; he looks forth at the window, and shows himself in giving them some comfort, that they may continue hoping for his return.

III. She repeats the gracious invitation he had given her to come a walking with him, v. 10–13. She remembers what her beloved said to her, for it had made a very pleasing and powerful impression upon her, and the *word that quickens us* we shall *never forget*. She relates it for the encouragement of others, telling them what he had said to her soul and *done for her soul*, Ps. 66:16.

1. He called her his love and his fair one. Whatever she is to others, to him she is acceptable, and in his eyes she is amiable. Those that take Christ for their beloved, he will own as his; never was any love lost that was bestowed upon Christ. Christ, by expressing his love to believers, invites and encourages them to follow him.

2. He called her to *rise and come away*, v. 10, and again v. 13. The repetition denotes backwardness in her (we have need to be often called to come away with Jesus Christ; *precept must be upon precept and line upon line*), but it denotes earnestness in him; so much is his heart set upon the welfare of precious souls that he importunes them most pressingly to that which is for

their own good.

3. He gave for a reason the return of the spring, and the pleasantness of the weather.

(1.) The season is elegantly described in a great variety of expressions. [1.] *The winter is past*, the dark, cold, and barren winter. Long winters and hard ones pass away at last; they do not endure always. And the spring would not be so pleasant as it is if it did not succeed the winter, which is a foil to its beauty, Eccl. 7:14. Neither the face of the heavens nor that of the earth is always the same, but subject to continual vicissitudes, diurnal and annual. *The winter is past*, but has not passed away for ever; it will come again, and we must provide for it in summer, Prov. 6:6, 8. We must weep in winter, and rejoice in summer, as though we wept and rejoiced not, for both are passing. [2.] *The rain is over and gone*, the winter-rain, the cold stormy rain; it is over now, and *the dew is as the dew of herbs*. Even the rain that drowned the world was over and gone at last (Gen. 8:1-3), and God promised to drown the world no more, which was a type and figure of the covenant of grace, Isa. 54:9. [3.] *The flowers appear on the earth*. All winter they are dead and buried in their roots, and there is no sign of them; but in the spring they revive, and show themselves in a wonderful variety and verdure, and, like the dew that produces them, *tarry not for man*, Mic. 5:7. They appear, but they will soon disappear again, and man in herein like *the flower of the field*, Job 14:2. [4.] *The time of singing of birds has come*. The little birds, which all the winter lie hid in their retirements and scarcely live, when the spring returns forget all the calamities of the winter, and to the best of their capacity chant forth the praises of their Creator. Doubtless he who understands the birds that cry for want (Ps. 147:9) takes notice of those that *sing for joy* Ps. 104:12. The singing of the birds may shame our silence in God's praises, who are better fed (Mt. 6:26), and better taught (Job 35:11), and are of *more value than many sparrows*. They live without inordinate care (Mt. 6:26) and therefore they sing, while we murmur. [5.] *The voice of the turtle is heard in our land*, which is one of the season-birds mentioned Jer. 8:7, that observe the time of their coming and the time of their singing, and so shame us who *know not the judgment of the Lord*, understand not the times, nor do that which is *beautiful in its season*, do not sing in singing time. [6.] *The fig-tree puts forth her green figs*, by which we know that summer is nigh (Mt. 24:32), when the green figs will be ripe figs and fit for use; and the *vines with the tender grape give a good smell*. The earth produces not only *flowers* (v. 12), but *fruits*; and the smell of the fruits, which are profitable, is to be preferred far before that of the flowers, which are only for show and pleasure. Serpents, they say, are driven away by the smell of the vines; and who is the old serpent, and who the true vine, we know very well.

(2.) Now this description of the returning spring, as a reason for coming away with Christ, is applicable [1.] To the introducing of the gospel in the room of the Old-Testament dispensation, during which it had been winter time with the church. Christ's gospel warms that which was cold, makes that fruitful which before was dead and barren; when it comes to any place it puts a beauty and glory upon that place (2 Co. 3:7, 8) and furnishes occasion for joy. Spring-time is pleasant time, and so is gospel-time. *Aspice venturo laetentur ut omnia seculo—Behold what joy the dawning age inspires!* said Virgil, from the Sibyls, perhaps with more reference to the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom at that time than he himself thought of. See Ps. 96:11. *Arise then*, and improve this spring-time. *Come away* from the world and the flesh, come into *fellowship with Christ*, 1 Co. 1:9. [2.] To the delivering of the church from the power of persecuting enemies, and the restoring of liberty and peace to it, after a

severe winter of suffering and restraint. When the storms of trouble are over and gone, when the *voice of the turtle*, the joyful sound of the gospel of Christ, is again heard, and ordinances are enjoyed with freedom, then *arise and come away* to improve the happy juncture. Walk in the light of the Lord; sing in the ways of the Lord. When the churches had rest, then were they edified, Acts 9:31. [3.] To the conversion of sinners from a state of nature to a state of grace. That blessed change is like the return of the spring, a universal change and a very comfortable one; it is a new creation; it is being born again. The soul that was hard, and cold, and frozen, and unprofitable, like the earth in winter, becomes fruitful, like the earth in spring, and by degrees, like it, brings its fruits to perfection. This blessed change is owing purely to the approaches and influences of the sun of righteousness, who calls to us from heaven to *arise and come away*; come, gather in summer. [4.] To the consolations of the saints after a state of inward dejection and despondency. A child of God, under doubts and fears, is like the earth in winter, its nights long, its days dark, good affections chilled, nothing done, nothing got, the hand sealed up. But comfort will return; the birds shall sing again, and the flowers appear. Arise therefore, poor drooping soul, and *come away* with thy beloved. *Arise, and shake thyself from the dust*, Isa. 52:2. *Arise, shine, for thy light has come* (Isa. 60:1); *walk in that light*, Isa. 2:5. [5.] To the resurrection of the body at the last day, and the glory to be revealed. The bones that lay in the grave, as the roots of the plants in the ground during the winter, shall then *flourish as a herb*, Isa. 66:14; 26:19. That will be an eternal farewell to winter and a joyful entrance upon an everlasting spring.

Verses 14-17

Here is, I. The encouraging invitation which Christ gives to the church, and every believing soul, to come into communion with him, v. 14.

1. His love is now his *dove*; David had called the church God's *turtle-dove* (Ps. 84:19), and so she is here called; a dove for beauty, her *wings covered with silver* (Ps. 18:13), for innocence and inoffensiveness; a gracious spirit is a dove-like spirit, harmless, loving quietness and cleanliness, and faithful to Christ, as the turtle to her mate. The Spirit descended *like a dove* on Christ, and so he does on all Christians, making them of a *meek and quiet spirit*. She is Christ's *dove*, for he owns her and delights in her; she can find no rest but in him and his ark, and therefore to him, as her Noah, she returns.

2. This dove is *in the clefts of the rock and in the secret places of the stairs*. This speaks either, (1.) Her praise. Christ is the rock, to whom she flies for shelter and in whom alone she can think herself safe and find herself easy, as a dove in the hole of a rock, when struck at by the birds of prey, Jer. 48:28. Moses was hid in a cleft of the rock, that he might behold something of God's glory, which otherwise he could not have borne the brightness of. She retires *into the secret places of the stairs*, where she may be alone, undisturbed, and may the better commune with her own heart. Good Christians will find time to be private. Christ often withdrew to a mountain *himself alone, to pray*. Or, (2.) her blame. She crept into the *clefts of the rock*, and the *secret places*, for fear and shame, any where to hide her head, being heartless and discouraged, and shunning even the sight of her beloved. Being conscious to herself of her own unfitness and unworthiness to come into his presence, and speak to him, she drew back, and was *like a silly dove without heart*, Hos. 7:11.

3. Christ graciously calls her out of her retirements: Come, *let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice*. She was

mourning like a dove (Isa. 38:14), bemoaning herself like the *doves of the valleys*, where they are near the clefts of the impending rocks, *mourning for her iniquities* (Eze. 7:16) and refusing to be comforted. But Christ calls her to *lift up her face without spot*, being purged from an evil conscience (Job 11:15; 22:26), to *come boldly to the throne of grace*, having a great *high priest* there (Heb. 4:16), to tell what her petition is and what her request: Let me *hear thy voice*, hear what thou hast to say; *what would you that I should do unto you?* Speak freely, speak up, and fear not a slight or repulse.

4. For her encouragement, he tells her the good thoughts he had of her, whatever she thought of herself: *Sweet is thy voice*; thy praying voice, though thou canst but *chatter like a crane or a swallow* (Isa. 38:14); it is music in God's ears. He has assured us that *the prayer of the upright is his delight*; he smelled a sweet savour from Noah's sacrifice, and the *spiritual sacrifices* are no less *acceptable*, 1 Pt. 2:5. This does not so much commend our services as God's gracious condescension in making the best of them, and the efficacy of the *much incense* which is *offered with the prayers of saints*, Rev. 8:3. "That countenance of thine, which thou art ashamed of, is comely, though now mournful, much more will it be so when it becomes cheerful." *Then* the voice of prayer is sweet and acceptable to God when the countenance, the conversation in which we show ourselves before men, is holy, and so comely, and agreeable to our profession. Those that are sanctified have the best comeliness.

II. The charge which Christ gives to his servants to oppose and suppress that which is a terror to his church and drives her, like a poor frightened dove, into the clefts of the rock, and which is an obstruction and prejudice to the interests of his kingdom in this world and in the heart (v. 15): *Take us the foxes* (take them for us, for it is good service both to Christ and the church), *the little foxes*, that creep in insensibly; for, though they are little, they do great mischief, they *spoil the vines*, which they must by no means be suffered to do at any time, especially now when our vines have *tender grapes* that must be preserved, or the vintage will fail. Believers are as vines, weak but useful plants; their fruits are as *tender crops* at first, which must have time to come to maturity. This charge to *take the foxes* is, 1. A charge to particular believers to mortify their own corruptions, their sinful appetites and passions, which are as *foxes, little foxes*, that destroy their graces and comforts, quash good motions, crush good beginnings, and prevent their coming to perfection. Seize the *little foxes*, the first risings of sin, the littles ones of Babylon (Ps. 137:9), those sins that seem little, for they often prove very dangerous. Whatever we find a hindrance to us in that which is good we must put away. 2. A charge to all in their places to oppose and prevent the spreading of all such opinions and practices as tend to corrupt men's judgments, debauch their consciences, perplex their minds, and discourage their inclinations to virtue and piety. Persecutors are foxes (Lu. 13:32); false prophets are foxes, Eze. 13:4. Those that sow the tares of heresy or schism, and, like Diotrephes, trouble the peace of the church and obstruct the progress of the gospel, they are the *foxes, the little foxes*, which must not be knocked on the head (*Christ came not to destroy men's lives*), but taken, that they may be tamed, or else restrained from doing mischief.

III. The believing profession which the church makes of her relation to Christ, and the satisfaction she takes in her interest in him and communion with him, v. 16. He had called her to *rise* and *come away* with him, to let him see her face and hear her voice; now this is her answer to that call, in which, though at present in the dark and at a distance,

1. She comforts herself with the thoughts of the mutual interest and relation that were between her and her beloved: *My*

beloved to me and I to him, so the original reads it very emphatically; the conciseness of the language speaks the largeness of her affection: "What he is to me and I to him may better be conceived than expressed." Note, (1.) It is the unspeakable privilege of true believers that Christ is theirs: *My beloved is mine*; this denotes not only propriety ("I have a title to him") but possession and tenure—"I receive from his fulness." Believers are partakers of Christ; they have not only an interest in him, but the enjoyment of him, are taken not only in the covenant, but into communion with him. All the benefits of his glorious undertaking, as Mediator, are made over to them. He is that to them which the world neither is nor can be, all that which they need and desire, and which will make a complete happiness for them. All he is is theirs, and all he has, all he has done, and all he is doing; all he has promised in the gospel, all he has prepared in heaven, all is yours. (2.) It is the undoubted character of all true believers that they are Christ's, and then, and then only, he is theirs. They have given their own selves to him (2 Co. 8:5); they receive his doctrine and obey his laws; they bear his image and espouse his interest; they belong to Christ. If we be his, his wholly, his only, his for ever, we may take the comfort of his being ours.

2. She comforts herself with the thoughts of the communications of his grace to his people: *He feeds among the lilies*. When she wants the tokens of his favour to her in particular, she rejoices in the assurance of his presence with all believers in general, who are lilies in his eyes. He *feeds* among them, that is, he takes as much pleasure in them and their assemblies as a man does in his table or in his garden, for he *walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks*; he delights to converse with them, and to do them good.

IV. The church's hope and expectation of Christ's coming, and her prayer grounded thereupon. 1. She doubts not but that the *day will break* and the *shadows will flee away*. The gospel-day will dawn, and the shadows of the ceremonial law will flee away. This was the comfort of the Old-Testament church, that, after the long night of that dark dispensation, the *day-spring from on high would at length visit them, to give light to those that sit in darkness*. When the sun rises the shades of the night vanish, so do the shadows of the day when the substance comes. The day of comfort will come after a night of desertion. Or it may refer to the second coming of Christ, and the eternal happiness of the saints; the shadows of our present state will flee away, our darkness and doubts, our griefs and all our grievances, and a glorious day shall dawn, a morning when the *upright shall have dominion*, a day that shall have no night after it. 2. She begs the presence of her beloved, in the mean time, to support and comfort her: "*Turn, my beloved, turn to me, come and visit me, come and relieve me, be with me always to the end of the age*. In the day of my extremity, make haste to help me, *make no long tarrying*. Come over even *the mountains of division*, interposing time and days, with some gracious anticipations of that light and love." 3. She begs that he would not only turn to her for the present, but hasten his coming to fetch her to himself. "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*. Though there be mountains in the way, thou canst, *like a roe, or a young hart*, step over them with ease. *O show thyself to me, or take me up to thee*."

Chapter 3

In this chapter, I. The church gives an account of a sore trial wherewith she was exercised through the withdrawing of her beloved from her, the pains she was at before she recovered the comfortable sense of his favour again, and the resolution she took, when she did recover it, not to lose it again, as she had done through her own carelessness (v. 1-5). II. The daughters of Jerusalem admire the excellencies of the church (v. 6). III. The church admires Jesus Christ under the person of Solomon, his bed, and the life-guards about it (v. 7, 8), his chariot (v. 9, 10). She calls upon the daughters of Zion, who were admiring her, to admire him rather, especially as he appeared on his coronation day and the day of his nuptials (v. 11).

Verses 1-5

God is not wont to say to the seed of Jacob, *Seek you me in vain*; and yet here we have the spouse for a great while seeking her beloved in vain, but finding him at last, to her unspeakable satisfaction. It was hard to the Old-Testament church to find Christ in the ceremonial law, and the types and figures which then were *of good things to come*. Long was the consolation of Israel looked for before it came. The watchman of that church gave little assistance to those who enquired after him; but at length Simeon had *him* in his arms *whom his soul loved*. It is applicable to the case of particular believers, who often walk in darkness a great while, but *at even time it shall be light*, and those that seek Christ to the end shall find him at length. Observe,

I. How the spouse sought him in vain *upon her bed* (v. 1); when she was up and looking about her, grace in act and exercise, though her beloved was withdrawn, yet she could see him at a distance (ch. 2:8), but now it was otherwise. She still continued her affection to him, still it was *he whom her soul loved*, that bond of the covenant still continued firm. *"Though he slay me, I will trust in him; though he leave me, I will love him. When I have him not in my arms, I have him in my heart."* But she wanted the communion she used to have with him, as David when he *thirsted for God, for the living God*. She sought him, but, 1. It was *by night on her bed*; it was late and lazy seeking. Her understanding was clouded; it was by night, in the dark. Her affections were chilled, it was on her bed half asleep. The wise virgins slumbered in the absence of the bridegroom. It was a dark time with the believer; she saw not her signs, and yet she sought them. Those whose souls love Jesus Christ will continue to seek him even in silence and solitude: their *reins* instruct them to do so, even *in the night season*. 2. She failed in her endeavour. Sometimes he is *found of those that seek him not* (Isa. 65:1), but here he is not found of one that sought him, either for punishment of her corruptions, her slothfulness and security (we miss of comfort because we do not seek it aright), or for the exercises of grace, her faith and patience, to try whether she will continue seeking. The woman of Canaan sought Christ, and found him not at first, that she might find him, at length, so much the more to her honour and comfort.

II. How she had sought him in vain abroad, v. 2. She had made trial of secret worship, and had gone through the duties of the closet, had remembered him on her bed and meditated on him in the *night-watches* (Ps. 63:6), but she did not meet with comfort. *My sore ran in the night*, and then *I remembered God and was troubled*, Ps. 77:2, 3. And yet she is not driven off by the disappointment from the use of further means; she resolves, *"I will rise now; I will not lie here if I cannot find my beloved here, nor be content if he be withdrawn. I will rise now without delay, and seek him immediately, lest he withdraw further from*

me." Those that would seek Christ so as to find him must lose no time. "*I will rise* out of a warm bed, and go out in a cold dark night, in quest of my beloved." Those that see Christ must not startle at difficulties. "*I will rise, and go about the city*, the holy city, in the streets, and the broad-ways;" for she knew he was not to be found in any blind by-ways. We must seek in the city, in Jerusalem, which was a type of the gospel-church. The likeliest place to find Christ is in the temple (Lu. 2:46), in the streets of the gospel-church, in holy ordinances, where the children of Zion pass and repass at all hours. She had a good purpose when she said, *I will arise now*, but the good performance was all in all. She arose, and *sought him* (those that are in pursuit of Christ, the knowledge of him and communion with him, must turn every stone, seek every where), and yet she *found him not*; she was still unsatisfied, uneasy, as Job, when he looked on all sides, but could not perceive any tokens of the divine favour (Job 23:8, 9), and the Psalmist often, when he complained that God hid his face from him, Ps. 88:14. We may be in the way of our duty and yet may miss the comfort, for *the wind bloweth where it listeth*. How heavy is the accent on this repeated complaint: *I sought him, but I found him not!* like that of Mary Magdalen, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him*, Jn. 20:13.

III. How she enquired of the watchmen concerning him, v. 3. In the night the watchmen *go about the city*, for the preservation of its peace and safety, to guide and assist the honest and quiet, as well as to be a check upon those that are disorderly; these met her in her walks, and she asked them if they could give her any tidings of her beloved. In the streets and broad-ways of Jerusalem she might meet with enough to divert her from her pursuit and to entertain her, though she could not meet her beloved; but she regards none in comparison with him. Gracious souls press through crowds of other delights and contentments in pursuit of Christ, whom they prefer before their chief joy. Mary Magdalen sees angels in the sepulchre, but that will not do unless she see Jesus. *Saw you him whom my soul loveth?* Note, We must evince the sincerity of our love to Christ by our solicitous enquiries after him. *The children of the bride-chamber will mourn when the bridegroom is taken away* (Mt. 9:15), especially for the sin which provoked him to withdraw; and, if we do so, we shall be in care to recover the sense of his favour and diligent and constant in the use of proper means in order thereunto. We must search the scriptures, be much in prayer, keep close to ordinances, and all with this upon our heart, *Saw you him whom my soul loveth?* Those only who have seen Christ themselves are likely to direct others to a sight of him. When the Greeks came to worship at the feast they applied to Philip, with such an address as this of the spouse to the watchmen, *Sir, we would see Jesus*, Jn. 12:21.

IV. How she found him at last, v. 4. She *passed from* the watchmen as soon as she perceived they could give her no tidings of her beloved; she would not stay with them, because he was not among them, but went on seeking, for (as Ainsworth observes) the society neither of brethren, nor of the church, nor of ministers, can comfort the afflicted conscience unless Christ himself be apprehended by faith. But soon after she parted from the watchmen she found him whom she sought, and then called him *him whom my soul loveth*, with as much delight as before with desire. Note, Those that continue seeking Christ shall find him at last, and when perhaps they were almost ready to despair of finding him. See Ps. 42:7, 8; 77:9, 10; Isa. 54:7, 8.

Disappointments must not drive us away from gracious pursuits. Hold out, faith and patience; *the vision is for an appointed time*, and, though the watchman can give us no account of it, *at the end it shall itself speak and not lie*; and the comfort that

comes in after long waiting, in the use of means, will be so much the sweeter at last.

V. How close she kept to him when she had found him. She is now as much in fear of losing him as before she was in care to find him: *I held him*, held him fast, as the women, when they met with Christ after his resurrection, *held him by the feet, and worshipped him*, Mt. 28:9. "*I would not let him go*. Not only, I would never do any thing to provoke him to depart, but I would by faith and prayer prevail with him to stay, and by the exercise of grace preserve inward peace." Those that know how hard comfort is come by, and how dearly it is bought, will be afraid of forfeiting it and playing it away, and will think nothing too much to do to keep it safe. *Non minor est virtus quam quaerere parta tueri—As much is implied in securing our acquisitions as in making them*. Those that have laid hold on wisdom must *retain her*, Prov. 3:18. Those that hold Christ fast in the arms of faith and love shall *not let him go*; he will abide with them.

VI. How desirous she was to make others acquainted with him: "*I brought him to my mother's house*, that all my relations, all who are dear to me, might have the benefit of communion with him." When Zaccheus found Christ, or rather was found of him, *salvation came to his house*, Lu. 19:9. Wherever we find Christ we must take him home with us to our houses, especially to our hearts. The church is our mother, and we should be concerned for her interests, that she may have Christ present with her and be earnest in prayer for his presence with his people and ministers always. Those that enjoy the tokens of Christ's favour to their own souls should desire that the church, and all religious assemblies in their public capacity, might likewise enjoy the tokens of his favour.

VII. What care she was in that no disturbance might be given him (v. 5); she repeats the charge she had before given (ch. 2:7) to the *daughters of Jerusalem* not to *stir up or awake her love*. When she *had brought him into her mother's house*, among her sisters, she gives them a strict charge to keep all quiet and in good order, to be very observant of him, careful to please him, and afraid of offending him. The charge given to the church in the wilderness concerning the angel of the covenant, who was among them, explains this. Ex. 23:21, *Beware of him and obey his voice; provoke him not*. See that none of you stir out of your places, lest you disturb him, but *with quietness work and mind your own business*; make no noise; let all *clamour and bitterness be put far from you*, for that *grieves the Holy Spirit of God*, Eph. 4:30, 31. Some make this to be Christ's charge to the *daughters of Jerusalem* not to disturb or disquiet his church, nor trouble the minds of the disciples; for Christ is very tender of the peace of his church, and all the members of it, even the little ones; and those that trouble them *shall bear their judgment*, Gal. 5:10.

Verse 6

These are the words of the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom the charge was given, v. 5. They had looked shily upon the bride because she was black (ch. 1:6); but now they admire her, and speak of her with great respect: *Who is this?* How beautiful she looks! Who would have expected such a comely and magnificent person to *come out of the wilderness?* As, when Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem, they said, *Who is this?* And of the accession of strangers to the church she herself says, with wonder (Isa. 49:21), *Who has begotten me these?* 1. This is applicable to the Jewish church, when, after forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they came out of it, to take a glorious possession of the land of promise; and this may very well be illustrated by

what Balaam said of them at that time, when they ascended *out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke*, and he stood admiring them: *From the top of the rocks I see him. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* Num. 23:9; 24:5. 2. It is applicable to any public deliverance of the church of God, as particularly of Babylon, the Old-Testament and the New-Testament Babylon; then the church is *like pillars of smoke*, ascending upwards in devout affections, the incense of praise, from which, as from Noah's sacrifice, God *smells a sweet savour*; then she is amiable in the eyes of her friends, and her enemies too cannot but have a veneration for her, and *worship at her feet, knowing that God has loved her*, Rev. 3:9. Sometimes the *fear of the Jews* was upon their neighbours, when they saw that *God was with them of a truth*, Esth. 8:17. 3. It is applicable to the recovery of a gracious soul out of a state of desertion and despondency. (1.) She ascends *out of the wilderness*, the dry and barren land, where there is *no way*, where there is *no water*, where travellers are still in want and ever at a loss; here a poor soul may long be left to wander, but shall come up, at last, under the conduct of the Comforter. (2.) She comes up *like pillars of smoke*, like a cloud of incense ascending from the altar or the smoke of the burnt-offerings. This intimates a fire of pious and devout affections in the soul, whence this smoke arises, and the mounting of the soul heaven-ward in this smoke (as Judges 13:20), the heart lifted up to God in the heavens, *as the sparks fly upward*. Christ's return to the soul gives life to its devotion, and its communion with God is most reviving when it ascends *out of a wilderness*. (3.) She is *perfumed with myrrh and frankincense*. She is replenished with the graces of God's Spirit, which are as sweet spices, or as the holy incense, which, being now kindled by his gracious returns, sends forth a very fragrant smell. Her devotions being now peculiarly lively, she is not only acceptable to God, but amiable in the eyes of others also, who are ready to cry out with admiration, *Who is this?* What a monument of mercy is this! The graces and comforts with which she is *perfumed* are called the *powders of the merchant*, for they are far-fetched and dear-bought, by our Lord Jesus, that blessed merchant, who took a long voyage, and was at vast expense, no less than that of his own blood, to purchase them for us. They are not the products of our own soil, nor the growth of our own country; no, they are imported from the heavenly Canaan, the better country.

Verses 7-11

The daughters of Jerusalem stood admiring the spouse and commending her, but she overlooks their praises, is not puffed up with them, but transfers all the glory to Christ, and directs them to look off from her to him, recommends him to their esteem, and sets herself to applaud him. Here he is three times called *Solomon*, and we have that name but three times besides in all this song, ch. 1:5; 8:11, 12. It is Christ that is here meant, who is greater than Solomon, and of whom Solomon was an illustrious type for his wisdom and wealth, and especially his building the temple.

Three things she admires him for:—

I. The safety of his bed (v. 7): *Behold his bed*, even *Solomon's*, very rich and fine; for such *the curtains of Solomon* were. *His bed, which is above Solomon's*, so some read it. Christ's bed, though he had *not where to lay his head*, is better than Solomon's best bed. The church is his bed, for he has said of it. *This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell*. The hearts of believers are his bed, for he lies all night between their breasts, Eph. 3:17. Heaven is his bed, the rest into which he entered when he had done his work. Or it may be meant of the sweet repose and satisfaction which gracious souls enjoy in communion with him; it is

called *his bed*, because, though we are admitted to it, and therefore it is called *our bed* (ch. 1:16), yet it is his peace that is our rest, Jn. 14:27. *I will give you rest*, Mt. 11:28. It is *Solomon's bed*, whose name signifies *peace*, because in his days Judah and Israel *dwelt safely under their vines and fig-trees*. That which she admires his bed for is the guard that surrounded it. Those that rest in Christ not only dwell at ease (many do so who yet are in the greatest danger) but they dwell in safety. Their holy serenity is under the protection of a holy security. This bed had *threescore valiant men about it*, as yeomen of the guard, or the band of gentlemen-pensioners; they are *of the valiant of Israel*, and a great many bold and brave men David's reign had produced. The life-guard men are well armed: *They all hold swords*, and know how to hold them; they are *expert in war*, well skilled in all the arts of it. They are posted about the bed at a convenient distance. They are in a posture of defence, *every man with his sword upon his thigh* and his hand upon his sword, ready to draw upon the first alarm, and this *because of fear in the night*, because of the danger feared; for the lives of princes, even the wisest and best, as they are more precious, so they are more exposed, and require to be more guarded than the lives of common persons. Or, *because of the fear* of it, and the apprehension which the spouse may have of danger, these guards are set for her satisfaction, that she may be *quiet from the fear of evil*, which believers themselves are subject to, especially *in the night*, when they are under a cloud as to their spiritual state, or in any outward trouble more than ordinary. Christ himself was under the special protection of his Father in his whole undertaking. *In the shadow of his hand he hid me* (Isa. 49:2); he had legions of angels at his command. The church is well guarded; more are with her than against her. Lest any hurt this vineyard, God himself *keeps it night and day* (Isa. 27:2, 3); particular believers, when they repose themselves in Christ and with him, though it may be night-time with them, and they may have their *fears in the night*, and yet safe, as safe as Solomon himself in the midst of his guards; the angels have a charge concerning them, ministers are appointed to *watch for their souls*, and they ought to be *valiant men, expert in the spiritual warfare*, holding *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, and having that girt *upon their thigh*, always ready to them for the silencing *of the fears* of God's people *in the night*. All the attributes of God are engaged for the safety of believers; they are kept as in a strong-hold by his power (1 Pt. 1:5), are safe in *his name* (Prov. 18:10), his peace protects those in whom it rules (Phil. 4:7), and the effect of righteousness in them is *quietness and assurance*, Isa. 32:17. Our danger is from *the rulers of the darkness of this world*, but we are safe in the *armour of light*.

II. The splendour of his chariot, v. 9, 10. As Christ and believers rest in safety under a sufficient guard, so when they appear publicly, as kings in their coaches of state, they appear in great magnificence. This chariot was of Solomon's own contriving and making, the materials very rich, *silver*, and *gold*, and *cedar*, and *purple*. He made it for himself, and yet made it *for the daughters of Jerusalem*, to oblige them. Some by this *chariot*, or *coach*, or *chaise* (the word is nowhere else used in scripture), understand the human nature of Christ, in which the divine nature rode as in an open chariot. It was a divine workmanship (*A body hast thou prepared me*); the structure was very fine, but that which was at the bottom of it was love, pure love to the children of men. Others make it to represent the everlasting gospel, in which, as in an open chariot, Christ shows himself, and as in a chariot of war rides forth triumphantly, *conquering and to conquer*. *The pillars*, the seven pillars (Prov. 9:1), are of *silver*, for the words of the Lord are *as silver tried* (Ps. 12:6), nay, they are better *than thousands of gold and silver*. It is hung

with *purple*, a princely colour; all the adornings of it are dyed in the precious blood of Christ, and that gives them this colour. But that which completes the glory of it is *love*; *it is paved with love*, it is lined with love, not love of strangers, as Solomon's was in the days of his defection, but *love of the daughters of Jerusalem*, a holy *love*. Silver is better than cedar, gold than silver, but love is better than gold, better than all, and it is put last, for nothing can be better than that. The gospel is all *love*. Mr. Durham applies it to the covenant of redemption, the way of our salvation, as it is contrived in the eternal counsel of God, and manifested to us in the scriptures. This is that work of Christ himself wherein the glory of his grace and love to sinners most eminently appears, and which makes him amiable and admirable in the eyes of believers. In this covenant love is conveyed to them, and they are carried in it to the perfection of love, and, as it were, ride in triumph. It is admirably framed and contrived, both for the glory of Christ and for the comfort of believers. It is *well ordered in all things, and sure* (2 Sa. 23:5); it has *pillars* that cannot be shaken, it is *made of the wood of Lebanon*, which can never rot; the basis of it is *gold*, the most lasting metal; the blood of the covenant, that rich *purple*, is the cover of this chariot, by which believers are sheltered from the wind and storms of divine wrath, and the troubles of this world; but the midst of it, and that which is all in all in it, is *love*, that *love of Christ which surpasses knowledge* and the dimensions of which are immeasurable.

III. The lustre of his royal person, when he appears in his greatest pomp, v. 11. Here observe,

1. The call that is given to the *daughters of Zion* to acquaint themselves with the glories of *king Solomon*: *Go forth, and behold him*. The multitude of the spectators adds to the beauty of a splendid cavalcade. Christ, in his gospel, manifests himself. Let each of us add to the number of those that give honour to him, by giving themselves the satisfaction of looking upon him. Who should pay respects to Zion's king but Zion's daughters? They have reason to rejoice greatly when he comes, Zec. 9:9. (1.) *Behold him* then. Look with pleasure upon Christ in his glory. Look upon him with an eye of faith, with a fixed eye. Here is a sight worth seeing; *behold*, and admire him, *behold*, and love him; look upon him, and know him again. (2.) *Go forth and behold him*; go off from the world, as those that see no beauty and excellency in it in comparison with what is to be seen in the Lord Jesus. Go out of yourselves, and let the light of his transcendent beauty put you out of conceit with yourselves. *Go forth* to the place where he is to be seen, to the street through which he passes, as Zaccheus.

2. The direction that is given them to take special notice of that which they would not see every day, and that was his *crown*, either the crown of gold, adorned with jewels, which he wore on his coronation-day (Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, though she did not procure that for him, yet, by her seasonable interposal, she helped to secure it to him when Adonijah was catching at it), or the garland or crown of flowers and green tied with ribbons which his mother made for him, to adorn the solemnity of his nuptials. Perhaps Solomon's coronation day was his marriage-day, *the day of his espousals*, when the garland his mother crowned him with was added to the crown his people crowned him with. Applying this to Christ, it speaks, (1.) The many honours put upon him, and the power and dominion he is entrusted with: *Go forth, and see king Jesus, with the crown wherewith his Father crowned him*, when he declared him his *beloved Son, in whom he was well-pleased*, when he *set him as King upon his holy hill of Zion*, when he advanced him to his own right hand, and invested him with a sovereign authority, both *in heaven and in earth*, and *put all things under his feet*. (2.) The dishonour put upon him by his persecutors. Some apply

it to the *crown of thorns* with which *his mother*, the Jewish church, *crowned him* on the day of his death, which was *the day of his espousals* to his church, when he *loved it, and gave himself for it* (Eph. 5:25); and it is observable that when he was *brought forth wearing the crown of thorns* Pilate said, and said it to the *daughters of Zion, Behold the man*. (3.) It seems especially to mean the honour done him by his church, as his mother, and by all true believers, in whose hearts he is formed, and of whom he has said, *These are my mother, my sister, and brother*, Mt. 12:50. They give him the glory of his undertaking; to him is glory *in the church*, Eph. 3:21. When believers accept of him as theirs, and join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant, [1.] It is his coronation-day in their souls. Before conversion they were crowning themselves, but then they begin to crown Christ, and continue to do so from that day forward. They appointed him their head; they bring *every thought into obedience to him*; they set up his throne in their hearts, and cast all their crowns at his feet. [2.] It is *the day of his espousals*, in which he betroths them to him for ever in lovingkindness and in mercies, joins them to himself in faith and love, and gives himself to them in the promises and all he has, to be theirs. *Thou shalt not be for another, so will I also be for thee*, Hos. 3:3. And to him they are presented as *chaste virgins*. [3.] It is *the day of the gladness of his heart*; he is pleased with the honour that his people do him, pleased with the progress of his interest among them. Does *Satan fall* before them? *In that hour Jesus rejoices in spirit*, Lu. 10:18, 21. There is joy in heaven over repenting sinners; the family is glad when the prodigal son returns. *Go forth and behold* Christ's grace toward sinners, as his *crown*, his brightest glory.

Chapter 4

Jesus Christ, having espoused his church to himself (ch. 3:11), highly commends her beauty in the several expressions of it, concluding her fair, all fair (v. 1-5 and again, v. 7). II. He retires himself, and invites her with him, from the mountains of terror to those of delight (v. 6, 8). III. He professes his love to her and his delight in her affection to him (v. 9–14). IV. She ascribes all she had that was valuable in her to him, and depends upon the continued influence of his grace to make her more and more acceptable to him (v. 15, 16).

Verses 1-7

Here is, I. A large and particular account of the beauties of the church, and of gracious souls on whom the image of God is renewed, consisting *in the beauty of holiness*. In general, he that is a competent judge of beauty, whose *judgment*, we are sure, *is according to truth*, and what all must subscribe to, he has said, *Behold, thou art fair*. She had commended him, and called all about her to take notice of his glories; and hereby she recommends herself to him, gains his favour, and, in return for her respects, he calls to all about him to take notice of her graces. Those that honour Christ he will honour, 1 Sa. 2:30.

1. He does not flatter her, nor design hereby either to make her proud of herself or to court her praises of him; but, (1.) It is to encourage her under her present dejections. Whatever others thought of her, she was amiable in his eyes. (2.) It is to teach her what to value herself upon, not any external advantages (which would add nothing to her, and the want of which would deprive her of nothing that was really excellent), but upon the comeliness of grace which he had put upon her. (3.) It is to invite others to think well of her too, and to join themselves to her: "Thou art *my love*, thou lovest me and art beloved of me, and therefore *thou art fair*." All the beauty of the saints is derived from him, and they shine by reflecting his light; it is *the beauty of the Lord our God* that is *upon us*, Ps. 90:17. She was espoused to him, and that made her beautiful. *Uxor fulget radiis mariti—The spouse shines in her husband's rays*. It is repeated, *Thou art fair*, and again, *Thou art fair*, denoting not only the certainty of it, but the pleasure he took in speaking of it.

2. As to the representation here made of the beauty of the church, the images are certainly very bright, the shades are strong, and the comparisons bold, not proper indeed to represent any external beauty, for they were not designed to do so, but *the beauty of holiness, the new man, the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible*. Seven particulars are specified, a number of perfection, for the church is enriched with manifold graces by *the seven spirits that are before the throne*, Rev. 1:4; 1 Co. 1:5, 7.

(1.) Her *eyes*. A good eye contributes much to a beauty: *Thou hast doves' eyes*, clear and chaste, and often cast up towards heaven. It is not the eagle's eye, that can face the sun, but the *dove's eye*, a humble, modest, mournful eye, that is the praise of those whom Christ loves. Ministers are the church's eyes (Isa. 52:8, *thy watchmen shall see eye to eye*); they must be like *doves' eyes*, harmless and inoffensive (Mt. 10:16), having their *conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity*. Wisdom and knowledge are the eyes of the new man; they must be clear, but not haughty, *not exercised in things too high for us*. When our aims and intentions are sincere and honest, then we have *doves' eyes*, when we look not unto *idols* (Eze. 18:6),

but have *our eyes ever towards the Lord*, Ps. 25:15. The *doves' eyes are within the locks*, which area as a shade upon them, so that, [1.] They cannot fully see. As long as we are here in this world we *know but in part*, for a hair hangs in our eyes; *we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness*; death will shortly cut those locks, and then we shall see all things clearly. [2.] They cannot be fully seen, but as the stars through the thin clouds. Some make it to intimate the bashfulness of her looks; she suffers not her eyes to wander, but limits them with her locks.

(2.) Her *hair*; it is compared to a *flock of goats*, which looked white, and were, on the top of the mountains, like a fine head of hair; and the sight was more pleasant to the spectator because the goats have not only gravity from their beards, but they are *comely in going* (Prov. 30:29), but it was most pleasant of all to the owner, much of whose riches consisted in his flocks. Christ puts a value upon that in the church, and in believers, which others make no more account of than of their hair. He told his disciples that *the very hairs of their head were all numbered*, as carefully as men number their flocks (Mt. 10:30), and that *not a hair of their head should perish*, Lu. 21:18. Some by the *hair* here understand the outward conversation of a believer, which ought to be comely, and decent, and agreeable to the holiness of the heart. The apostle opposes good works, such as become the professors of godliness, to *the plaiting of the hair*, 1 Tim. 2:9, 10. Mary Magdalen's hair was beautiful when she wiped the feet of Christ with it.

(3.) Her *teeth*, v. 2. Ministers are the church's teeth; like nurses, they chew the meat for the babes of Christ. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the priests and Levites, who fed upon the sacrifices as the representatives of the people. Faith, by which we feed upon Christ, meditation, by which we ruminate on the word and chew the cud upon what we have heard, in order to the digesting of it, are the teeth of the new man. These are here compared to a *flock of sheep*. Christ called his disciples and ministers a *little flock*. It is the praise of teeth to be *even*, to be white, and kept clean, *like sheep from the washing*, and to be firm and well fixed in the gums, and not like sheep that cast their young; for so the word signifies which we translate *barren*. It is the praise of ministers to be even in mutual love and concord, to be pure and clean from all moral pollutions, and to be fruitful, bringing forth souls to Christ, and nursing his lambs.

(4.) Her *lips*; these are compared to a *thread of scarlet*, v. 3. Red lips are comely, and a sign of health, as the paleness of the lips is a sign of faintness and weakness; her *lips* were the colour of *scarlet*, but thin *lips, like a thread of scarlet*. The next words explain it: *Thy speech is comely*, always with grace, *good*, and *to the use of edifying*, which adds much to the beauty of a Christian. When we praise God with *our lips, and with the mouth make confession* of him *to salvation*, then they are as a *thread of scarlet*. All our good works and good words must be *washed in the blood of Christ*, dyed like the *scarlet thread*, and then, and not till then, they are acceptable to God. The Chaldee applies it to the chief priest, and his prayers for Israel on the day of atonement.

(5.) Her *temples*, or cheeks, which are here compared to a *piece of a pomegranate*, a fruit which, when cut in two, has rich veins or specks in it, like a blush in the face. Humility and modesty, blushing to lift up our faces before God, blushing at the remembrance of sin and in a sense of our unworthiness of the honour put upon us, will beautify us very much in the eyes of Christ. The blushes of Christ's bride are *within her locks*, which intimates (says Mr. Durham) that she blushes when no other

sees, and for that which none sees but God and conscience; also that she seeks not to proclaim her humility, but modestly covers that too; yet the evidences of all these, in a tender walk, appear and are comely.

(6.) Her *neck*; this is here compared to *the tower of David*, v. 4. This is generally applied to the grace of faith, by which we are united to Christ, as the body is united to the head by the neck; this *is like the tower of David*, furnishing us with weapons of war, especially *bucklers* and *shields*, as the soldiers were supplied with them out of that tower, for *faith* is our *shield* (Eph. 6:16): those that have it never want a *buckler*, for God will compass them *with his favour as with a shield*. When this *neck is like a tower*, straight, and stately, and strong, a Christian goes on in his way, and works with courage and magnanimity, and does not hang a drooping head, and he does when faith fails. Some make the *shields of the mighty men*, that are here said to hang up in *the tower of David*, to be the monuments of the valour of David's worthies. Their shields were preserved, to keep in remembrance them and their heroic acts, intimating that it is a great encouragement to the saints to hold up their heads, to see what great things the saints in all ages have accomplished and won by faith. In Heb. 11 we have the *shields of the mighty men* hung up, the exploits of believers and the trophies of their victories.

(7.) Her *breasts*; these are *like two young roes that are twins*, v. 5. The church's breasts are both for ornament (Eze. 16:7) and for use; they are the *breasts of her consolation* (Isa. 66:11), as she is said to *suck the breasts of kings*, Isa. 60:16. Some apply these to the two Testaments; others to the two sacraments, the seals of the covenant of grace; others to ministers, who are to be spiritual nurses to the children of God and to give out to them the *sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby*, and, in order to that, are themselves to *feed among the lilies* where Christ feeds (ch. 2:16), that they may be to the babes of the church as full breasts. Or the breasts of a believer are his love to Christ, which he is pleased with, as a tender husband is with the affections of his wife, who is therefore said to be to him *as the loving hind and the pleasant roe*, because *her breasts satisfy him at all times*, Prov. 5:19. This includes also his edifying others and communicating grace to them, which adds much to a Christian's beauty.

II. The bridegroom's resolution hereupon to retire *to the mountain of myrrh* (v. 6) and there to make his residence. This *mountain of myrrh* is supposed to signify Mount Moriah, on which the temple was built, where incense was daily burnt to the honour of God. Christ was so pleased with the beauty of his church that he chose this to be his rest for ever; here he will dwell *till the day break and the shadows flee away*. Christ's parting promise to his disciples, as the representatives of the church, answer to this: *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world*. Where the ordinances of God are duly administered there Christ will be, and there we must meet him at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Some make these to be the words of the spouse, either modestly ashamed of the praises given her, and willing to get out of the hearing of them, or desirous to be constant to the holy hill, not doubting but there to find suitable and sufficient succour and relief in all her straits, and there to cast anchor, and wish for the day, which, at the time appointed, would *break and the shadows flee away*. The holy hill (as some observe) is here called both a *mountain of myrrh*, which is bitter, and a *hill of frankincense*, which is sweet, for there we have occasion both to mourn and rejoice; repentance is a bitter sweet. But in heaven it will be all frankincense, and no myrrh. Prayer is compared to incense, and Christ will meet his praying people and will bless them.

III. His repeated commendation of the beauty of the spouse (v. 7): *Thou art all fair, my love*. He had said (v. 1), *Thou art fair*; but here he goes further, and, in review of the particulars, as of those of the creation, he pronounces *all very good*: "*Thou art all fair, my love*; thou art all over beautiful, and there is nothing amiss in thee, and thou hast all beauties in thee; thou art *sanctified wholly* in every part; *all things have become new* (2 Co. 5:17); there is not only a new face and a new name, but a new man, a new nature; *there is no spot in thee*, as far as thou art renewed." The spiritual sacrifices must be without blemish. *There is no spot* but such as is often the spot of God's children, none of the leopard's spots. The church, when Christ shall present it to himself a glorious church, will be altogether *without spot or wrinkle*, Eph. 5:27.

Verses 8-14

These are still the words of Christ to his church, expressing his great esteem of her and affection to her, the opinion he had of her beauty and excellency, the desire he had of, and the delight he had in, her converse and society. And so ought men to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and takes pleasure in it as if it were spotless and had no fault, when yet it is compassed with infirmity. Now, observe here,

I. The endearing names and titles by which he calls her, to express his love to her, to assure her of it, and to engage and excite her love to him. Twice here he calls her *My spouse* (v. 8, 11) and three times *My sister, my spouse*, v. 9, 10, 12. Mention was made (ch. 3:11) of *the day of his espousals*, and, after that, she is called his *spouse*, not before. Note, There is a marriage-covenant between Christ and his church, between Christ and every true believer. Christ calls his church his *spouse*, and his calling her so makes her so. "I have betrothed thee unto me for ever; and, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." He is not ashamed to own the relation, but, as becomes a kind and tender husband, he speaks affectionately to her, and calls her his *spouse*, which cannot but strongly engage her to be faithful to him. Nay, because no one relation among men is sufficient to set forth Christ's love to his church, and to show that all this must be understood spiritually, he owns her in two relations, which among men are incompatible, *My sister, my spouse*. Abraham's saying of Sarah, *She is my sister*, was interpreted as a denying of her to be his wife; but Christ's church is to him both a *sister* and a *spouse*, as Mt. 12:50, a *sister and mother*. His calling her *sister* is grounded upon his taking our nature upon him in his incarnation, and his making us partakers of his nature in our sanctification. He clothed himself with a *body* (Heb. 2:14), and he clothes believers with his *Spirit* (1 Co. 6:17), and so they become his *sisters*. They are children of God his Father (2 Co. 6:18) and so they become his *sisters*; he that sanctifies, and those that are sanctified, are all of one (Heb. 2:11); and he owns them, and loves them, as his sisters.

II. The gracious call he gives her to come along with him as a faithful bride, that must forget her own people and her father's house, and leave all to cleave to him. *Ubi tu Caius, ibi ego Caia—Where thou Caius art, I Caia will be. Come with me from Lebanon*, v. 8.

1. It is a precept; so we take it, like that (ch. 2:10, 13), *Rise up, and come away*. All that have by faith come to Christ must come with Christ, in holy obedience to him and compliance with him. Being joined to him, we must walk with him. This is his command to us daily: "*Come with me, my spouse*; come with me to God as a Father; come with me onward, heavenward; come

forward with me; come up with me; *come with me from Lebanon, from the top of Amana, from the lions' dens.*" These mountains are to be considered, (1.) As seemingly delightful places. Lebanon is called *that goodly mountain*, Deu. 3:25. We read of the *glory of Lebanon* (Isa. 35:2) and its goodly smell, Hos. 14:6. We read of the pleasant *dew of Hermon* (Ps. 133:3) and the *joy of Hermon* (Ps. 89:12); and we may suppose the other mountains here mentioned to be pleasant ones, and so this is Christ's call to his spouse to come off from the world, all its products, all its pleasures, to sit loose to all the delights of sense. All those must do so that would come with Christ; they must take their affections off from all present things; yea, though they be placed at the upper end of the world, on *the top of Amana* and *the top of Shenir*, though they enjoy the highest satisfactions the creature can propose to give, yet they must *come away* from them all, and live above the tops of the highest hills on earth, that they may have *their conversation in heaven*. *Come from* those mountains, to go along with Christ to the holy mountain, the *mountain of myrrh*, v. 6. Even while we have our residence on these mountains, yet we must look for them, look above them. Shall we *lift up our eyes to the hills*? No; *our help comes from the Lord*, Ps. 121:1, 2. We must look beyond them, to *the things that are not seen* (as these high hills are), that *are eternal*. *From the tops of Shenir and Hermon*, which were on the other side Jordan, as from Pisgah, they could see the land of Canaan; from this world we must look forward to the better country. (2.) They are to be considered as really dangerous. These hills indeed are pleasant enough, but there are in them *lions' dens*; they are *mountains of the leopards*, mountains of prey, though they seem *glorious and excellent*, Ps. 76:4. Satan, that *roaring lion*, in the *prince of this world*; in the things of it he lies in wait to devour. On the tops of these mountains there are many dangerous temptations to those who would take up their residence in them; and therefore *come with me from* them; let us not set our hearts upon the things of this world, and then they can do us no hurt. *Come with me from* the temples of idolaters, and the societies of wicked people (so some understand it); *come out from among them, and be you separate*. *Come from* under the dominion of your own lusts, which are as *lions and leopards*, fierce upon us, and making us fierce.

2. It may be taken as a promise: Thou shalt *come with me from Lebanon, from the lions' dens*; that is, (1.) "Many shall be brought home to me, as living members of the church, from every point, from Lebanon in the north, Amana in the west, Hermon in the east, Shenir in the south, from all parts, to *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*," Mt. 8:11. See Isa. 49:11, 12. Some *from the tops of* these mountains, some of the great men of this world, shall give themselves to Christ. (2.) The church shall be delivered from her persecutors, in due time; though now she *dwells among lions* (Ps. 57:4), Christ will take her with himself from among their dens.

III. The great delight Christ takes in his church and in all believers. He delights in them,

1. As in an agreeable bride, *adorned for her husband* (Rev. 21:2), who *greatly desires her beauty*, Ps. 45:11. No expressions of love can be more passionate than these here, in which Christ manifests his affection to his church; and yet that great proof of his love, his dying for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, goes far beyond them all. A spouse so dearly bought and paid for could not but be dearly loved. Such a price being given for her, a high value must needs be put upon her accordingly; and both together may well set us a wondering at *the height and depth, and length and breadth, of the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge*, that love in which he *gave himself for us* and gives himself to us. Observe, (1.) How he is

affected towards his spouse: *Thou hast ravished my heart*; the word is used only here. *Thou hast hearted me*, or *Thou has unhearted me*. New words are coined to express the inexpressibleness of Christ's surprising love to his church; and the strength of that love is set forth by that which is a weakness in men, the being so much in love with one object as to be heartless to every thing else. This may refer to that love which Christ had to the chosen remnant, before the worlds were, when *his delights were with the sons of men* (Prov. 8:31), that first love, which brought him from heaven to earth, to *seek and save* them at such vast expense, yet including the complacency he takes in them when he has brought them to himself. Note, Christ's heart is upon his church; so it has appeared all along. His treasure is in it; it is his *peculiar treasure* (Ex. 19:5); and therefore there his heart is also. "Never was love like unto the love of Christ, which made him even mindless of himself, when he emptied himself of his glory, and despised all shame and pain, for our sakes. The wound of love towards us, which he had from eternity in himself, made him neglect all the wounds and reproaches of the cross;" so Bishop Reynolds. Thus let us love him. (2.) What it is that thus affects him with delight. [1.] The regard she has to him: *Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thy eyes*, those *doves' eyes*, clear and chaste (which were commended, v. 1), with one glance of those eyes. Christ is wonderfully pleased with those that look unto him as their Saviour, and through the eye of faith dart their affections to him, above any rival whatsoever, and whose *eyes are ever towards him*; he is soon aware of the first look of a soul towards him and meets it with his favours. [2.] The ornaments she has from him, that is, the obedience she yields to him, for that is the *chain of her neck*, the graces that enrich her soul, which are connected as links in chain, the exercise of these graces in a conversation which adorns both herself and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which she professes to believe (as a gold chain is an ornament to persons of quality), and an entire submission to the commanding power of his love. Having shaken off the *bands of our neck*, by which we were tied to this world (Isa. 52:2), and *the yoke of our transgressions*, we are bound with the *cords of love*, as *chains of gold*, to Jesus Christ, and our necks are brought under his sweet and easy yoke, to drawn in it. This recommends us to Jesus Christ, for this is that true wisdom which, in his account, is *an ornament of grace unto the head and chains about the neck*, Prov. 1:9. [3.] The affection she has for him: *How fair is thy love!* how beautiful is it! Not only thy love itself, but all the fruits and products of it, its working in the heart, its works in the life. How well does it become a believer thus to love Christ, and what a pleasure does Christ take in it! Nothing recommends us to Christ as this does. *How much better is thy love than wine*, than all the wine that was poured out to the Lord in the drink-offerings! Hence the fruit of the vine is said to *cheer God and man*, Judges 9:13. She had said of Christ's love, *It is better than wine* (ch. 1:2), and now Christ says so of hers; there is nothing lost by praising Christ, nor will he be behindhand with his friends in kindness. [4.] The ointments, the odours wherewith she is perfumed, the gifts and graces of the Spirit, her good works, which are *an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God*, Phil. 4:18. *The smell of thy ointment is better than all spices*, such as the queen of Sheba presented to Solomon, camel-loads of them (1 Ki. 10:2), or, rather, than all the spices that were used in compounding the holy incense which was burned daily on the golden altar. Love and obedience to God are more pleasing to Christ than sacrifice or incense. *The smell of her garments* too, the visible profession she makes of religion, and relation to Christ, before men, and wherein she appears to the world, this is very grateful to Christ, as *the smell of Lebanon*. Christ having put upon his spouse the *white raiment* of his own righteousness

(Rev. 3:18), and *the righteousness of saints* (Rev. 19:8), and this perfumed with holy joy and comfort, he is well pleased with it. [5.] Her words, both in her devotion to God and her discourses with men (v. 11): *Thy lips O my spouse! drop as the honeycomb*, drop that which is very sweet, and drop it freely and plentifully. If what God speaks to us be *sweeter* to us *than the honey and the honeycomb* (Ps. 19:10), what we say to him in prayer and praise shall also be pleasing to him: *Sweet is thy voice*. And if *out of a good treasure in the heart we bring forth good things*, if our *speech be always with grace*, if our *lips use knowledge aright*, if they *disperse knowledge*, they then, in Christ's account, even *drop the honeycomb*, out-drop it. *Honey and milk* (the two staple commodities of Canaan) *are under thy tongue*; that is, in thy heart, not only reserved there for thy own use as a sweet morsel for thyself, but ready there for the use of others. In the word of God there is sweet and wholesome nourishment, milk for babes, honey for those that are grown up. Christ is well-pleased with those that are full of his word.

2. As in a pleasant garden. And well may a very great delight be compared to the delight taken in a garden, when the happiness of Adam in innocency was represented by the putting of him into a garden, a garden of pleasure. This comparison is pursued, v. 12–14. The church is fitly compared to a *garden*, to a garden which, as was usual, had a *fountain* in it. Where Solomon made himself *gardens* and *orchards* he made himself *pools of water* (Eccl. 2:5, 6), not only for curiosity and diversion, in water-works, but for use, to *water the gardens*. Eden was *well watered*, Gen. 2:10; 13:10. Observe, (1.) The peculiarity of this garden: It is a *garden enclosed*, a paradise separated from the common earth. It is appropriated to God; he has *set it apart for himself*; Israel is God's portion, the lot of his inheritance. It is enclosed for secrecy; the saints are God's hidden ones, therefore *the world knows them not*; Christ walks in his garden unseen. It is enclosed for safety; a hedge of protection is made about it, which all the powers of darkness cannot either find or make a gap in. God's vineyard is *fenced* (Isa. 5:2); there is a wall about it, a wall of fire. It has a spring in it, and a fountain, but it is a *spring shut up* and a *fountain sealed*, which sends its streams *abroad* (Prov. 5:16), but is itself carefully locked up, that it may not by any injurious hand be muddied or polluted. The souls of believers are as *gardens enclosed*; grace in them is as a *spring shut up* there in the *hidden man of the heart*, where the water that Christ gives is a *well of living water*, Jn. 4:14; 7:38. The Old-Testament church was a *garden enclosed* by the partition wall of the ceremonial law. The Bible was then a *spring shut up* and a *fountain sealed*; it was confined to one nation; but now the wall of separation is removed, the gospel preached to every nation, and *in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew*. (2.) The products of this garden. It is as the garden of Eden, where *the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*, Gen. 2:9. *Thy plants*, or plantations, *are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits*, v. 13. It is not like *the vineyard of the man void of understanding*, that was *all grown over with thorns and nettles*; but here are *fruits, pleasant fruits, all trees of frankincense, and all the chief spices*, v. 14. Here is a great plenty of fruits and great variety, nothing wanting which might either beautify or enrich this garden, might make it either delightful or serviceable to its great Lord. Every thing here is the best of the kind. Their *chief spices* were much more valuable, because much more durable, than the choicest of our flowers. Solomon was a great master in botany as well as other parts of natural philosophy; he treated largely of trees (1 Ki. 4:33), and perhaps had reference to some specific qualities of the fruits here specified, which made them very fit for the purpose for which he alludes to them; but we must be content to observe, in general, the saints in the church,

and graces in the saints, are very fitly compared to these *fruits and spices*; for, [1.] They are planted, and do not grow of themselves; *the trees of righteousness* are the *planting of the Lord* (Isa. 61:3); grace springs from an incorruptible seed. [2.] They are precious and of high value; hence we read of the *precious sons of Zion* and their *precious faith*; they are *plants of renown*. [3.] They are pleasant, and of a sweet savour to God and man, and, as strong aromatics, diffuse their fragrancy. [4.] They are profitable and of great use. Saints are the blessings of this earth, and their graces are their riches, with which they trade as the merchants of the east with their spices. [5.] They are permanent, and will be preserved to good purpose, when flowers are withered and good for nothing. Grace, ripened into glory, will last for ever.

Verses 15-16

These seem to be the words of the spouse, the church, in answer to the commendations which Christ, the bridegroom, had given of her as a pleasant fruitful garden. Is she a garden?

I. She owns her dependence upon Christ himself to make this garden fruitful. To him she has an eye (v. 15) as the *fountain of gardens*, not only the founder of them, by whom they are planted and to whom they owe their being, but the fountain of them, by which they are watered and to which they own their continuance and well-being, and without whose constant supplies they would soon become like the dry and barren wilderness. To him she gives all the glory of her fruitfulness, as being nothing without him: *O fountain of gardens!* fountain of all good, of all grace, do not thou fail me. Does a believer say to the church, *All my springs are in thee*, in thee, O Zion? (Ps. 87:7), the church transmits the praise to Christ, and says to him, *All my springs are in thee*; thou art *the well of living waters* (Jer. 2:13), out of which flow the *streams of Lebanon*, the river Jordan, which had its rise at the foot of Mount Lebanon, and the waters of the sanctuary, which issued out *from under the threshold of the house*, Eze. 47:1. Those that are gardens to Christ must acknowledge him a fountain to them, from whose fulness they receive and to whom it is owing that their souls are as *a watered garden*, Jer. 31:12. *The city of God* on earth is made *glad* with the *river* that flows from this fountain (Ps. 46:4), and the new Jerusalem has its *pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*, Rev. 22:1.

II. She implores the influences of the blessed Spirit to make this garden fragrant (v. 16): *Awake, O north wind! and come, thou south*. This is a prayer, 1. For the church in general, that there may be a plentiful effusion of the Spirit upon it, in order to its flourishing estate. Ministers' gifts are *the spices*; when the Spirit is poured out these flow forth, and then *the wilderness becomes a fruitful field*, Isa. 32:15. This prayer was answered in the pouring out of the Spirit on *the day of pentecost* (Acts 2:1), ushered in by a *mighty wind*; then the apostles, who were bound up before, flowed forth, and were *a sweet savour to God*, 2 Co. 2:15. 2. For particular believers. Note, (1.) Sanctified souls are as gardens, gardens of the Lord, enclosed for him. (2.) Graces in the soul are as spices in these gardens, that in them which is valuable and useful. (3.) It is very desirable that the spices of grace should flow forth both in pious and devout affections and in holy gracious actions, that with them we may honour God, adorn our profession, and do that which will be grateful to good men. (4.) The blessed Spirit, in his operations upon the soul, is as the *north and the south wind*, which *blows where it listeth*, and from several points, Jn. 3:8. There is the north wind of convictions, and the south wind of comforts; but all, like the wind, brought *out of God's treasures* and *fulfilling*

his word. (5.) The flowing forth of the spices of grace depends upon the gales of the Spirit; he stirs up good affections, and works in us both to will and to do that which is good; it is he that makes manifest the savour of his knowledge by us. (6.) We ought therefore to wait upon the Spirit of grace for his quickening influences, to pray for them, and to lay our souls under them. God has promised to give us his Spirit, but he will for this be enquired of.

III. She invites Christ to the best entertainment the garden affords: "*Let my beloved then come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits*; let him have the honour of all the products of the garden (it is fit he should), and let me have the comfort of his acceptance of them, for that is the best account they can be made to turn to." Observe, 1. She calls it *his* garden; for those that are espoused to Christ call nothing their own, but what they have devoted to him and desire to be used for him. When the spices flow forth then it is fit to be called his garden, and not till then. The fruits of the garden are his pleasant fruits, for he planted them, watered them, and gave the increase. What can we pretend to merit at Christ's hands when we can invite him to nothing but what is his own already? 2. She begs he would visit it, and accept of what it produced. The believer can take little pleasure in his garden, unless Christ, the beloved of his soul, come to him, nor have any joy of the fruits of it, unless they redound some way or other to the glory of Christ, and he will think all he has well bestowed upon him.

Chapter 5

In this chapter we have, I. Christ's gracious acceptance of the invitation which his church had given him, and the kind visit which he made to her (v. 1). II. The account which the spouse gives of her own folly, in putting a slight upon her beloved, and the distress she was in by reason of his withdrawals (v. 2-8). III. The enquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem concerning the amiable perfections of her beloved (v. 9), and her particular answer to that enquiry (v. 10-16). "Unto you that believe he is thus precious."

Verse 1

These words are Christ's answer to the church's prayer in the close of the foregoing chapter, *Let my beloved come into his garden*; here he has come, and lets her know it. See how ready God is to hear prayer, how ready Christ is to accept the invitations that his people give him, though we are backward to hear his calls and accept his invitations. He is free in condescending to us, while we are shy of ascending to him. Observe how the return answered the request, and outdid it. 1. She called him *her beloved* (and really he was so), and invited him because she loved him; in return to this, he called her his *sister and spouse*, as several times before, ch. 4. Those that make Christ their best beloved shall be owned by him in the nearest and dearest relations. 2. She called the garden *his*, and the pleasant fruits of it *his*, and he acknowledges them to be so: It is *my garden*, it is *my spice*. When God was displeased with Israel he turned them off to Moses (They are *thy people*, Ex. 32:7); and he called the appointed feasts of the Lord *their appointed feasts* (Isa. 1:14); but now that they are in his favour he owns them for his garden. "Though of small account, yet it is mine." Those that are in sincerity give up themselves and all they have and can do to Jesus Christ, he will do them the honour to stamp them, and what they have and do for him, with his own mark, and say, *It is mine*. 3. She invited him to *come into his garden*, and he says, *I have come*. Isa. 58:9, *Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am*. When Solomon prayed that God would come and take possession of the house he had built for him, he did come; *his glory filled the house* (2 Chr. 7:2), and (v. 16) he let him know that he had chosen and sanctified this house, that his *name might be there for ever*. Those that throw open the door of their souls to Jesus Christ shall find him ready to come in to them; and in every place where he records his name he will meet his people, and bless them, Ex. 20:24. 4. She desired him to *eat his pleasant fruits*, to accept of the sacrifices offered in his temple, which were as the fruits of his garden, and he does so, but finds they are not gathered and ready for eating, therefore he does himself gather them. As the fruits are his, so is the preparation of them; he finds his heart unready for his entertainment, but does himself draw out into exercise those gracious habits which he had planted there. What little good there is in us would be shed and lost if he did not gather it, and preserve it to himself. 5. She only desired him to *eat the fruits* of the garden, but he brought along with him something more, *honey*, and *wine*, and *milk*, which yield substantial nourishment, and which were the products of Canaan, Immanuel's land. Christ delights himself greatly in that which he has both conferred upon his people and wrought in them. Or we may suppose this to have been prepared by the spouse herself, as Esther prepared for the king her husband *a banquet of wine*; it is but plain fare, and what is natural, honey and milk, but, being kindly designed, it is kindly accepted; imperfections are overlooked; the honey-comb is eaten with

the honey, and the weakness of the flesh passed by and pardoned, because the *spirit is willing*. When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection he did eat with them a piece of a honey-comb (Lu. 24:42, 43), in which this scripture was fulfilled. He did not drink the wine only, which is liquor for men, for great men, but the milk too, which is liquor for children, little children, for he was to be the *holy child Jesus*, that had need of milk. 6. She only invited him to come himself, but he, bringing his own entertainment along with him, brings his friends too, and invites them to share in the provisions. *The more the merrier*, we say; and here, where there was so great a plenty, there was not the worse fare. When our Lord Jesus fed 5000 at once *they did all eat and were filled*. Christ invites all his friends to the *wine and milk* which he himself drinks of (Isa. 55:1), to the *feast of fat things and wines on the lees*, Isa. 25:6. The great work of man's redemption, and the riches of the covenant of grace, are a feast to the Lord Jesus and they ought to be so to us. The invitation is very free, and hearty, and loving: *Eat, O friends!* If Christ comes to sup with us, it is we that sup with him, Rev. 3:20. *Eat, O friends!* Those only that are Christ's friends are welcome to his table; his enemies, *that will not have him to reign over them, have no part nor lot in the matter*. *Drink, yea, drink abundantly*. Christ, in his gospel, has made plentiful provision for poor souls. *He fills the hungry with good things*; there is enough for all, there is enough for each; *we are not straitened in him* or in his grace, let us not therefore be straitened in our own bosoms. *Open the mouth widely, and Christ will fill it. Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit*, Eph. 5:18. Those that entertain Christ must bid his friends welcome with him; Jesus and his disciples were called together to the marriage (Jn. 2:2), and Christ will have all his friends to rejoice with him in the day of his espousals to his church, and, in token of that, to feast with him. In spiritual and heavenly joys there is no danger of exceeding; there we may *drink abundantly, drink of the river of God's pleasures* (Ps. 36:8), and be *abundantly satisfied*, Ps. 65:4.

Verses 2-8

In this song of loves and joys we have here a very melancholy scene; the spouse here speaks, not to her beloved (as before, for he has withdrawn), but of him, and it is a sad story she tells of her own folly and ill conduct towards him, notwithstanding his kindness, and of the just rebukes she fell under for it. Perhaps it may refer to Solomon's own apostasy from God, and the sad effects of that apostasy after God had come into his garden, had taken possession of the temple he had built, and he had feasted with God upon the sacrifices (v. 1); however, it is applicable to the too common case both of the churches and particular believers, who by their carelessness and security provoke Christ to withdraw from them. Observe,

I. The indisposition that the spouse was under, and the listlessness that had seized her (v. 2): *I sleep, but my heart wakes*. Here is, 1. Corruption appearing in the actings of it: *I sleep*. The wise virgins slumbered. She *was on her bed* (ch. 3:1), but now she sleeps. Spiritual distempers, if not striven against at first, are apt to grow upon us and to get ground. *She slept*, that is, pious affections cooled, she neglected her duty and grew remiss in it, she indulged herself in her ease, was secure and off her watch. This is sometimes the bad effect of more than ordinary enlargements—a good cause. St. Paul himself was in danger of being puffed up with abundant revelations, and of saying, *Soul, take thy ease*, which made a *thorn in the flesh* necessary for him, to keep him from sleeping. Christ's disciples, when he had come into his garden, the garden of his agony, were heavy with sleep, and could not watch with him. True Christians are not always alike lively and vigorous in religion. 2. Grace remaining,

notwithstanding, in the habit of it: "*My heart wakes; my own conscience reproaches me for it, and ceases not to rouse me out of my sluggishness. The spirit is willing, and, after the inner man, I delight in the law of God, and with my mind I serve that. I am, for the present, overpowered by temptation, but all does not go one way in me. I sleep, but it is not a dead sleep; I strive against it; it is not a sound sleep; I cannot be easy under this indisposition.*" Note, (1.) We ought to take notice of our own spiritual slumbers and distempers, and to reflect upon it with sorrow and shame that we have fallen asleep when Christ has been nigh us in his garden. (2.) When we are lamenting what is amiss in us, we must not overlook the good that is wrought in us, and preserved alive: "My heart wakes in Christ, who is dear to me as my own heart, and is my life; when I sleep, *he neither slumbers nor sleeps.*"

II. The call that Christ gave to her, when she was under this indisposition: *It is the voice of my beloved;* she knew it to be so, and was soon aware of it, which was a sign that her heart was awake. Like the child Samuel, she heard at the first call, but did not, like him, mistake the person; she knew it to be the voice of Christ. He knocks, to awaken us to come and let him in, knocks by his word and Spirit, knocks by afflictions and by our own consciences; though this is not expressly quoted, yet probably it is referred to (Rev. 3:20), *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.* He calls sinners into covenant with him and saints into communion with him. Those whom he loves he will not let alone in their carelessness, but will find some way or other to awaken them, to rebuke and chasten them. When we are unmindful of Christ he thinks of us, and provides that our faith fail not. Peter denied Christ, but the Lord turned and looked upon him, and so brought him to himself again. Observe how moving the call is: *Open to me, my sister, my love.* 1. He sues for entrance who may demand it; he knocks who could easily knock the door down. 2. He gives her all the kind and most endearing titles imaginable: *My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled;* he not only gives her no hard names, nor upbraids her with unkindness in not sitting up for him, but, on the contrary, studies how to express his tender affection to her still. *His loving-kindness he will not utterly take away.* Those that by faith are espoused to Christ he looks upon as his sisters, his loves, his doves, and all that is dear; and, being clothed with his righteousness, they are undefiled. This consideration should induce her to open to him. Christ's love to us should engage ours to him, even in the most self-denying instances. *Open to me.* Can we deny entrance to such a friend, to such a guest? Shall we not converse more with one that is infinitely worthy of our acquaintance, and so affectionately desirous of it, though we only can be gainers by it? 3. He pleads distress, and begs to be admitted *sub formâ pauperis—under the character of a poor traveller* that wants a lodging: "*My head is wet with the dew, with the cold drops of the night; consider what hardships I have undergone, to merit thee, which surely may merit from thee so small a kindness as this.*" When Christ was crowned with thorns, which no doubt fetched blood from his blessed head, then was his head *wet with the dew.* "Consider what a grief it is to me to be thus unkindly used, as much as it would be to a tender husband to be kept out of doors by his wife in a rainy stormy night." Do we thus require him for his love? The slights which careless souls put upon Jesus Christ are him as a *continual dropping in a very rainy day.*

III. The excuse she made to put off her compliance with this call (v. 3): *I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on again?* She is half asleep; she knows the voice of her beloved; she knows his knock, but cannot find in her heart to open to him. She was undressed, and would not be at the pains to dress herself again; she had *washed her feet,* and would not have occasion to wash

them again. She could not send another to open the door (it must be our own act and deed to let Christ into our hearts), and yet she was loth to go herself; she did not say, *I will not open*, but, *How shall I?* Note, Frivolous excuses are the language of prevailing slothfulness in religion; Christ calls to us to open to him, but we pretend we have no mind, or we have no strength, or we have no time, and therefore think we may be excused, as the *sluggard* that *will not plough by reason of cold*. And those who ought to *watch for the Lord's coming* with their *loins girt*, if they ungird themselves and put off their coat, will find it difficult to recover their former resolution and to put it on again; it is best therefore to keep tight. Making excuses (Lu. 14:18) is interpreted making light of Christ (Mt. 22:5), and so it is. Those put a great contempt upon Christ that cannot find in their hearts to bear a cold blast for him, or get out of a warm bed.

IV. The powerful influences of divine grace, by which she was made willing to rise and open to her beloved. When he could not prevail with her by persuasion he *put in his hand by the hole in the door*, to unbolt it, as one weary of waiting, v. 4. This intimates a work of the Spirit upon her soul, by which she was unwilling made willing, Ps. 110:3. The conversion of Lydia is represented by the *opening of her heart* (Acts 16:14) and Christ is said to open his disciples' understandings, Lu. 24:45. He that *formed the spirit of man within him* knows all the avenues to it, and which way to enter into it; he can find the *hole of the door* at which to put in his hand for the conquering of prejudices and the introducing of his own doctrine and law. He has the *key of David* (Rev. 3:7), with which he opens the door of the heart in such a way as is suited to it, as the key is fitted to the wards of the lock, in such a way as not to put a force upon its nature, but only upon its ill nature.

V. Her compliance with these methods of divine grace at last: *My bowels were moved for him*. The will was gained by a good work wrought upon the affections: *My bowels were moved for him*, as those of the two disciples were when Christ made their *hearts to burn within them*. She was moved with compassion to her beloved, because his *head was wet with dew*. Note, Tenderness of spirit, and a heart of flesh, prepare the soul for the reception of Christ into it; and therefore his love to us is represented in such a way as is most affecting. Did Christ redeem us in his pity? Let us in pity receive him, and, for his sake, those that are his, when at any time they are in distress. This good work, wrought upon her affections, raised her up, and made her ashamed of her dulness and slothfulness (v. 5, *I rose up, to open to my beloved*), his grace inclining her to do it and conquering the opposition of unbelief. It was her own act, and yet he wrought it in her. And now her *hands dropped with myrrh upon the handles of the lock*. Either, 1. She found it there when she applied her hand to the lock, to shoot it back; he that *put in his hand by the hole of the door* left it there as an evidence that he had been there. When Christ has wrought powerfully upon a soul he leaves a blessed sweetness in it, which is very delightful to it. With this he oiled the lock, to make it go easy. Note, When we apply ourselves to our duty, in the lively exercises of faith, under the influence of divine grace, we shall find it will go on much more readily and sweetly than we expected. If we will but rise up, to open to Christ, we shall find the difficulty we apprehended in it strangely overcome, and shall say with Daniel, *Now let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me*, Dan. 10:19. Or, 2. She brought it thither. Her *bowels being moved for her beloved*, who had stood so long in the cold and wet, when she came to open to him she prepared to anoint his head, and so to refresh and comfort him, and perhaps to prevent his catching cold; she was in such haste to meet him that she would not stay to make the usual preparation,

but dipped her hand in her box of ointment, that she might readily anoint his head at his first coming in. Those that open the doors of their hearts to Christ, those *everlasting doors*, must meet him with the lively exercises of faith and other graces, and with these must anoint him.

VI. Her said disappointment when she did open to her beloved. And here is the most melancholy part of the story: *I opened to my beloved*, as I intended, but, alas! *my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone. My beloved was gone, was gone*, so the word is.

1. She did not open to him at his first knock, and now she came too late, when afterwards she *would have inherited this blessing*. Christ will be sought while he may be found; if we slip our time, we may lose our passage. Note, (1.) Christ justly rebukes our delays with his denials, and suspends the communications of comfort from those that are remiss and drowsy in their duty. (2.) Christ's departures are matter of great grief and lamentation to believers. The royal psalmist never complains of any thing with such sorrowful accents as God's *hiding his face* from him, and *casting him off*, and *forsaking him*. The spouse here is ready to tear her hair, and rend her clothes, and wring her hands, crying, *He is gone, he is gone*; and that which cuts her to the heart is that she may thank herself, she provoked him to withdraw. If Christ departs, it is because he takes something unkindly.

2. Now observe what she does, in this case, and what befel her. (1.) She still calls him her *beloved*, being resolved, how cloudy and dark soever the day be, she will not quit her relation to him and interest in him. It is a weakness, upon every apprehension either of our own failings or of God's withdrawals, to conclude hardly as to our spiritual state. Every desertion is not despair. I will say, *Lord, I believe*, though I must say, *Lord, help my unbelief*. Though he leave me, I love him; he is mine. (2.) She now remembers the words he said to her when he called her, and what impressions they made upon her, reproaching herself for her folly in not complying sooner with her convictions: *"My soul failed when he spoke; his words melted me when he said, My head is wet with dew; and yet, wretch that I was, I lay still, and made excuses, and did not open to him."* The smothering and stifling of our convictions is a thing that will be very bitter in the reflection, when God opens our eyes. Sometimes the word has not its effect immediately upon the heart, but it melts it afterwards, upon second thoughts. *My soul now melted because of his words* which he had spoken before. (3.) She did not go to bed again, but went in pursuit of him: *I sought him; I called him*. She might have saved herself this labour if she would but have bestirred herself when he first called; but we cut ourselves out a great deal of work, and create ourselves a great deal of trouble, by our own slothfulness and carelessness in improving our opportunities. Yet it is her praise that, when her beloved has withdrawn, she continues seeking him; her desires toward him are made more strong, and her enquiries after him more solicitous, by his withdrawals. She calls him by prayer, calls after him, and begs of him to return; and she not only prays but uses means, she seeks him in the ways wherein she used to find him. (4.) Yet still she missed of him: *I could not find him; he gave me no answer*. She had no evidence of his favour, no sensible comforts, but was altogether in the dark, and in doubt concerning his love towards her. Note, There are those who have a true love for Christ, and yet have not immediate answers to their prayers for his smiles; but he gives them an equivalent if he strengthens them with the strength in their souls to continue seeking him, Ps. 138:3. St. Paul could not prevail for the removing

of the *thorn in the flesh*, but was answered with grace sufficient for him. (5.) She was ill-treated by the watchmen; *They found me; they smote me; they wounded me*, v. 7. They took her for a lewd woman (because she went about the streets at that time of night, when they were walking their rounds), and beat her accordingly. Disconsolate saints are taken for sinners, and are censured and reproached as such. Thus Hannah, when she was praying in the *bitterness of her soul*, was wounded and smitten by Eli, one of the prime watchmen, when he said to her, *How long wilt thou be drunken?* so counting her a daughter of Belial, 1 Sa. 1:14, 15. It is no new thing for those that are of the loyal loving subjects of Zion's King to be misrepresented by the watchmen of Zion, as enemies or scandals to his kingdom; they could not abuse and persecute them but by putting them into an ill name. Some apply it to those ministers who, though watchmen by office, yet misapply the word to awakened consciences, and through unskillfulness, or contempt of their griefs, add affliction to the afflicted, and *make the hearts of the righteous sad whom God would not have made sad* (Eze. 13:22), discouraging those who ought to be encouraged and talking to the grief of those *whom God has wounded*, Ps. 59:26. Those watchmen were bad enough that could not, or would not, assist the spouse in her enquiries after her beloved (ch. 3:3); but these were much worse, that hindered her with their severe and uncharitable censures, *smote her and wounded her* with their reproaches, and though they were the *keepers of the wall of Jerusalem*, as if they had been the breakers of it, *took away her veil*, from her rudely and barbarously, as if it had been only a pretence of modesty, but a cover of the contrary. Those whose outward appearances are all good, and who yet are invidiously condemned and run down as hypocrites, have reason to complain, as the spouse here, of the *taking away of their veil* from them. (6.) When she was disabled by the abuses the watchmen gave her to prosecute her enquiry herself she gave charge to those about her to assist her in the enquiry (v. 8): *I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem!* all my friends and acquaintance, *if you find my beloved*, it may be you may meet with him before I shall, *what shall you tell him?* so some read. "Speak a good word for me; tell him that *I am sick of love*." Observe here, [1.] What her condition was. She loved Jesus Christ to such a degree that his absence made her sick, extremely sick, she could not bear it, and she was in pain for his return as a woman in travail, as Ahab for Naboth's vineyard, which he so passionately coveted. This is a sickness which is a sign of a healthy constitution of soul, and will certainly end well, a sickness that will not be death, but life. It is better to be sick of love to Christ than at ease in love to the world. (2.) What course she took in this condition. She did not sink into despair, and conclude that she should die of her disease, but she sent after her beloved; she asked the advice of her neighbours, and begged their prayers for her, that they would intercede with him on her behalf. "Tell him, though I was careless, and foolish, and slothful, and rose not up so soon as I should have done to open to him, yet I love him; he *knows all things*, he *knows that I do*. Represent me to him as sincere, though in many instances coming short of my duty; nay, represent me to him as sincere, though in many instances coming short of my duty; nay, represent me as an object of his pity, that he may have compassion on me and help me." She does not bid them tell him how the watchmen had abused her; how unrighteous soever they were in it, she acknowledges that *the Lord is righteous*, and therefore bears it patiently. "But tell him that I am wounded with love to him." Gracious souls are more sensible of Christ's withdrawals than of any other trouble whatsoever.

Languet amaui, non languet amor—

The lover languishes, but not his love.

Verses 9-16

Here is, I. The question which the daughters of Jerusalem put to the spouse concerning her beloved, in answer to the charge she had given them, v. 9. Observe, 1. The respectful title they give to the spouse: *O thou fairest among women!* Our Lord Jesus makes his spouse truly amiable, not only in his eyes, but in the eyes of all the daughters of Jerusalem. The church is the most excellent society in the world, the communion of saints the best communion, and the beauty of the sanctuary a transcendent beauty. The saints are the most excellent people; holiness is the symmetry of the soul; it is its agreement with itself; it recommends itself to all that are competent judges of it. Even those that have little acquaintance with Christ, as those daughters of Jerusalem here, cannot but see an amiable beauty in those that bear his image, which we should love wherever we see it, though in different dresses. 2. Their enquiry concerning her beloved: "*What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* If thou wilt have us to find him for thee, give us his marks, that we may know him when we see him." (1.) Some take it for a scornful question, blaming her for making such ado about him: "Why shouldst thou be so passionate in enquiring after thy beloved, more than others are after theirs? Why shouldst thou be so set upon him, more than others that yet have a kindness for him?" Those that are zealous in religion are men wondered at by such as are indifferent to it. The many careless ones laugh at the few that are solicitous and serious. "What is there in him that is so very charming, more than in another person? If he be gone, thou, who art the *fairest among women*, wilt soon have another with an equal flame." Note, Carnal hearts see nothing excellent or extraordinary in the Lord Jesus, in his person or offices, in his doctrine or in his favours; as if there were no more in the knowledge of Christ, and in communion with him, than in the knowledge of the world and in its conversation. (2.) Others rather take it for a serious question, and suppose that those who put it intended, [1.] To comfort the spouse, who, they knew, would recover new spirits if she did but talk awhile of her beloved; nothing would please her better, nor give a more powerful diversion to her grief, than to be put upon the pleasing task of describing the beauties of her beloved. [2.] To inform themselves; they had heard, in general, that he was excellent and glorious, but they desired to know more particularly. They wondered what moved the spouse to charge them concerning her beloved with so much vehemence and concern, and therefore concluded there must be something more in him than in another beloved, which they are willing to be convinced of. *Then* there begin to be some hopes of people when they begin to enquire concerning Christ and his transcendent perfections. And sometimes the extraordinary zeal of one, in enquiring after Christ, may be a means to provoke many (2 Co. 9:2), as the apostle, by the faith of the Gentiles, would stir up the Jews to a holy emulation, Rom. 11:14. See Jn. 4:10.

II. The account which the spouse gives of her beloved in answer to this question. We should always be ready to instruct and assist those that are enquiring after Christ. Experienced Christians, who are well acquainted with Christ themselves, should do all they can to make others acquainted with him.

1. She assures them, in general, that he is one of incomparable perfections and unparalleled worth (v. 10): "Do not you know my beloved? Can the daughters of Jerusalem be ignorant of him that is Jerusalem's crown and crowned head? Let me tell you then," (1.) That he has every thing in him that is lovely and amiable: *My beloved is white and ruddy*, the colours that make up a

complete beauty. This points not at any extraordinary beauty of his body, when he should be incarnate (it was never said of the child Jesus, as of the child Moses, when he was born, that he was *exceedingly fair*, Acts 7:20; nay, *he had no form nor comeliness*, Isa. 53:2); but his divine glory, and the concurrence of every thing in him as Mediator, to make him truly lovely in the eyes of those that are enlightened to discern spiritual things. In him we may behold the *beauty of the Lord*; he was the *holy child Jesus*; that was his fairness. If we look upon him as made to us *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*, he appears, in all, very amiable. His love to us renders him lovely. He is *white* in the spotless innocency of his life, *ruddy* in the bloody sufferings he went through at his death,—*white* in his glory, as God (when he was transfigured *his raiment was white as the light*), *ruddy* in his assuming the nature of man, *Adam—red earth*,—*white* in his tenderness towards his people, *ruddy* in his terrible appearances against his and their enemies. His complexion is a very happy composition. (2.) That he has that loveliness in him which is not to be found in any other: He is *the chief among ten thousand*, a nonsuch for beauty, *fairer than the children of men*, than any of them, than all of them; there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him; every thing else is to be accounted *loss and dung in comparison of him*, Phil. 3:8. *He is higher than the kings of the earth* (Ps. 89:27) and has *obtained a more excellent name* than any of the principalities and powers of the upper or lower world, Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1, 4. He is a *standard-bearer among ten thousand* (so the word is), the tallest and comeliest of the company. He is himself *lifted up as an ensign* (Isa. 11:10), to whom we must be gathered and must always have an eye. And there is all the reason in the world why he should have the innermost and uppermost place in our souls who is the *fairest of ten thousands* in himself and the fittest of twenty thousands for us.

2. She gives a particular detail of his accomplishments, conceals not his power or comely proportion. Every thing in Christ is amiable. Ten instances she here gives of his beauty, which we need not be nice in the application of, lest the wringing of them bring forth blood and prove the wresting of them. The design, in general, is to show that he is every way qualified for his undertaking, and has all that in him which may recommend him to our esteem, love, and confidence. Christ's appearance to John (Rev. 1:13, etc.) may be compared with the description which the spouse gives of him here, the scope of both being to represent him transcendently glorious, that is, both great and gracious, made lovely in the eyes of believers and making them happy in himself. (1.) *His head is as the most fine gold. The head of Christ is God* (1 Co. 11:3), and it is promised to the saints that *the Almighty shall be their gold* (Job 22:25), their defence, their treasure; much more was he so to Christ, *in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*, Col. 2:9. Christ's head bespeaks his sovereign dominion over all and his vital influence upon his church and all its members. This is as *gold, gold*; the former word in the original signifies shining gold, the latter strong solid gold; Christ's sovereignty is both beautiful and powerful. Nebuchadnezzar's monarchy is compared to a *head of gold* (Dan. 2:38), because it excelled all the other monarchies, and so does Christ's government. (2.) *His locks are bushy and black*, not *black as the tents of Kedar*, whose blackness was their deformity, to which therefore the church compares herself (ch. 1:5), but *black as a raven*, whose blackness is his beauty. Sometimes Christ's hair is represented as *white* (Rev. 1:14), denoting his eternity, that he is *the ancient of days*; but here as *black and bushy*, denoting that he is ever young and that there is in him no decay, nothing that waxes old. Every thing that belongs to Christ is amiable in the eyes of a believer, even his hair is

so; it was pity that it should be wet, as it was, *with the dew*, and these *locks with the drops of the night*, while he waited to be gracious, v. 2. (3.) *His eyes are as the eyes of doves*, fair and clear, and chaste and kind, *by the rivers of waters*, which doves delight in, and in which, as in a glass, they see themselves. They are washed, to make them clean, *washed with milk*, to make them white, and *fitly set*, neither starting out nor sunk in. Christ is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, for they are doves' eyes, Hab. 1:13. All believers speak with pleasure of the omniscience of Christ, as the spouse here of *his eyes*; for, though it be terrible to his enemies *as a flame of fire* (Rev. 1:14), yet it is amiable and comfortable to his friends, as *doves' eyes*, for it is a witness to their integrity. *Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. Blessed and holy are those that walk always as under the eye of Christ. (4.) *His cheeks* (the rising of the face) *are as a bed of spices*, raised in the gardens, which are the beauty and wealth of them, and *as sweet flowers*, or towers of sweetness. There is that in Christ's countenance which is amiable in the eyes of all the saints, in the least glimpse of him, for the cheek is but a part of the face. The half discoveries Christ makes of himself to the soul are reviving and refreshing, fragrant above the richest flowers and perfumes. (5.) *His lips are like lilies*, not white like lilies, but sweet and pleasant. Such are *the words of his lips* to all that are sanctified, *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*; such are the *kisses of his lips*, all the communications of his grace; *grace is poured into his lips*, and those that heard him *wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*. *His lips* are as *lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh*. Never any lilies in nature dropped myrrh, but nothing in nature can fully set forth the beauty and excellence of Christ, and therefore, to do it by comparison, there must be a composition of images. (6.) *His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl*, a noted precious stone, v. 14. Great men had their hands adorned with gold rings on their fingers, set with diamonds or other precious stones, but, in her eye, *his hands* themselves were *as gold rings*; all the instances of his power, the works of his hands, all the performances of his providence and grace, are all rich, and pure, and precious, as gold, *as the precious onyx and the sapphire*, all fitted to the purpose for which they were designed *as gold rings* to the finger, and all beautiful and very becoming, *as rings set with beryl*. His hands, which are stretched forth both to receive his people and to give to them, are thus rich and comely. (7.) *His bowels are as bright ivory*, for so it should be rendered, rather than *his belly*, for it is the same word that was used for *bowels* (v. 4) and is often ascribed to God (as Isa. 63:15; Jer. 31:20), and so it denotes his tender compassion and affection for his spouse, and the love he has to her even in her desolate and deserted state. This love of his is like *bright ivory*, finely polished, and richly *overlaid with sapphires*. The love itself is strong and firm, and the instances and circumstances of it are bright and sparkling, and add much to the inestimable value of it. (8.) *His legs are as pillars of marble*, so strong, and stately, and no disgrace, no, not to the *sockets of fine gold upon* which they are *set*, v. 15. This bespeaks his stability and steadfastness; where he sets his foot he will fix it; he is able to bear all the weight of the government that is upon his shoulders, and his legs will never fail under him. This sets forth the stateliness and magnificence of *the goings of our God, our King, in his sanctuary* (Ps. 68:24), and the steadiness and evenness of all his dispensations towards his people. *The ways of the Lord are equal*; they are all *mercy and truth*; these are the *pillars of marble*, more lasting than the pillars of heaven. (9.) *His countenance* (his port and mien) *is as Lebanon*, that stately hill; his aspect beautiful and charming, like the prospect of that pleasant forest or park, *excellent as the cedars*, which, in height and strength, excel other trees, and are of

excellent use. Christ is a goodly person; the more we look upon him the more beauty we shall see in him. (10.) *His mouth is most sweet*; it is sweetness itself; it is *sweetnesses* (so the word is); it is pure essence, nay, it is the quintessence of all delights, v. 16. The words of his mouth are all sweet to a believer, sweet as milk to babes (to whom it is agreeable), as honey to those that are grown up (Ps. 119:103), to whom it is delicious. The kisses of his mouth, all the tokens of his love, have a transcendent sweetness in them, and are most delightful to those who have their *spiritual senses exercised*. *To you that believe he is precious*.

3. She concludes with a full assurance both of faith and hope, and so gets the mastery of her trouble. (1.) Here is a full assurance of faith concerning the complete beauty of the Lord Jesus: "*He is altogether lovely*. Why should I stand to mention particulars, when throughout there is nothing amiss?" She is sensible she does him wrong in the particular descriptions of him, and comes far short of the dignity and merit of the subject, and therefore she breaks off with the general encomium: *He is truly lovely*, he is wholly so; there is nothing in him but what is amiable, and nothing amiable but what is in him. *He is all desires*; he has all in him that one can desire. And therefore all her desire is towards him, and she seeks him thus carefully and cannot rest contented in the want of him. Who can but love him who is so lovely? (2.) Here is a full assurance of hope concerning her own interest in him: "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend*; and therefore wonder not that I thus long after him." See with what a holy boldness she claims relation to him, and then with what a holy triumph she proclaims it. It is property that sweetens excellency. To see Christ, and not to see him as ours, would be rather a torture than a happiness; but to see one that is thus lovely, and to see him as ours, is a complete satisfaction. Here is a true believer, [1.] Giving an entire consent to Christ: "He is mine, *my Lord and my God* (Jn. 20:28), mine according to the tenour of the gospel-covenant, mine in all relations, bestowed upon me, to be all that to me that my poor soul stands in need of." [2.] Taking an entire complacency in Christ. It is spoken of here with an air of triumph: "This is he whom I have chosen, and to whom I have given up myself. None but Christ, none but Christ. This is he on whom my heart is, for he is my best-beloved; this is he in whom I trust, and from whom I expect all good, *for this is my friend*." Note, Those that make Christ their beloved shall have him their friend; he has been, is, and will be, a special friend to all believers. He loves those that love him; and those that have him their friend have reason to glory in him, and speak of him with delight. "Let others be governed by the love of the world, and seek their happiness in its friendship and favours, *This is my beloved and this is my friend*. Others may do as they please, but this is my soul's choice, my soul's rest, my life, my joy, my all; this is he whom I desire to live and die with."

Chapter 6

In this chapter, I. The daughters of Jerusalem, moved with the description which the church had given of Christ, enquire after him (v. 1). II. The church directs them where they may meet with him (v. 2, 3). III. Christ is now found of those that sought him, and very highly applauds the beauty of his spouse, as one extremely smitten with it (v. 4-7), preferring her before all others (v. 8, 9), recommending her to the love and esteem of all her neighbours (v. 10), and, lastly, acknowledging the impressions which her beauty had made upon him and the great delight he took in it (v. 11-13).

Verses 1-3

Here is, I. The enquiry which the daughters of Jerusalem made concerning Christ, v. 1. They still continue their high thoughts of the church, and call her, as before, the *fairest among women*; for true sanctity is true beauty. And now they raise their thoughts higher concerning Christ: *Whither has thy beloved gone, that we may seek him with thee?* This would be but an indecent, unacceptable, compliment, if the song were not to be understood spiritually; for love is jealous of a rival, would monopolize the beloved, and cares not that others should join in seeking him; but those that truly love Christ are desirous that others should love him too, and be joined to him; nay, the greatest instance of duty and respect that the church's children can show to their mother is to join with her in seeking Christ. The *daughters of Jerusalem*, who had asked (ch. 5:9), *What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* wondering that the spouse should be so passionately in love with him, are now of another mind, and are themselves in love with him; for, 1. The spouse had described him, and shown them his excellencies and perfections; and therefore, though they have not seen him, yet, believing, they love him. Those that undervalue Christ do so because they do not know him; when God, by his word and Spirit, discovers him to the soul, with that ray of light the fire of love to him will be kindled. 2. The spouse had expressed her own love to him, her rest in that love, and triumphed in it: *This is my beloved*; and that flame in her breast scattered sparks into theirs. As sinful lusts, when they break out, defile many, so the pious zeal of some may *provoke many*, 2 Co. 9:2. 3. The spouse had bespoken their help in seeking her beloved (ch. 5:8); but now they beg hers, for they perceive that now the cloud she had been under began to scatter, and the sky to clear up, and, while she was describing her beloved to them, she herself retrieved her comfort in him. Drooping Christians would find benefit themselves by talking of Christ, as well as do good to others. Now here, (1.) They enquire concerning him, *"Whither has thy beloved gone?"* which may must we steer our course in pursuit of him?" Note, Those that are made acquainted with the excellencies of Christ, and the comfort of an interest in him, cannot but be inquisitive after him and desirous to know where they may meet with him. (2.) They offer their service to the spouse to accompany her in quest of him: *We will seek him with thee*. Those that would find Christ must seek him, seek him early, seek him diligently; and it is best seeking Christ in concert, to join with those that are seeking him. We must seek for communion with Christ in communion with saints. We know *whither our beloved has gone*; he has gone to heaven, *to his Father, and our Father*. He took care to send us notice of it, that we might know how to direct to him, Jn. 20:17. We must by faith see him there, and by prayer seek him there, with boldness *enter into the holiest*, and herein must join with *the generation of those that seek him* (Ps. 24:6), even with *all that in every place call*

upon him, 1 Co. 1:2. We must pray with and for others.

II. The answer which the spouse gave to this enquiry, v. 2, 3. Now she complains not any more, as she had done (ch. 5:6), "He is gone, he is gone," that she knew not where to find him, or doubted she had lost him for ever; no,

1. Now she knows very well where he is (v. 2): "*My beloved* is not to be found in the streets of the city, and the crowd and noise that are there; there I have in vain looked for him" (as his parents *sought him among their kindred and acquaintance, and found him not*); "but he *has gone down to his garden*, a place of privacy and retirement." The more we withdraw from the hurry of the world the more likely we are to have acquaintance with Christ, who took his disciples into a garden, there to be witnesses of the agonies of his love. Christ's church is a garden enclosed, and separated from the open common of the world; it is *his garden*, which he has planted as he did the garden of Eden, which he takes care of, and delights in. Though he had gone up to the paradise above, yet he comes down to his garden on earth; it lies low, but he condescends to visit it, and wonderful condescension it is. *Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth?* Those that would find Christ may expect to meet with him *in his garden* the church, for *there he records his name* (Ex. 20:24); they must attend upon him in the ordinances which he has instituted, the word, sacraments, and prayer, wherein he will be with us *always, even to the end of the world*. The spouse here refers to what Christ had said (ch. 5:1), *I have come into my garden*. It is as if she had said, "What a fool was I to fret and fatigue myself in seeking him where he was not, when he himself had told me where he was!" Words of direction and comfort are often out of the way when we have occasion to use them, till the blessed Spirit brings them to our remembrance, and then we wonder how we overlooked them. Christ has told us that he would *come into his garden*; thither therefore we must go to seek him. *The beds*, and smaller *gardens*, in this greater, are the particular churches, the *synagogues of God in the land* (Ps. 84:8); the *spices* and *lilies* are particular believers, the planting of the Lord, and pleasant in his eyes. When Christ comes down to his church it is, (1.) *To feed among the gardens*, to feed his flock, which he feeds not, as other shepherds, in the open fields, but in his garden, so well are they provided for, Ps. 23:2. He comes to feed his friends, and entertain them; there you may not only find him, but find his table richly furnished, and a hearty welcome to it. He comes to feed himself, that is, to please himself with the products of his own grace in his people; *for the Lord takes pleasure in those that fear him*. He has many gardens, many particular churches of different sizes and shapes; but, while they are his, he feeds in them all, manifests himself among them, and is well pleased with them. (2.) *To gather lilies*, wherewith he is pleased to entertain and adorn himself. He picks the lilies one by one, and gathers them to himself; and there will be a general harvest of them at the great day, when he will send forth his angels, to gather all his lilies, that he may be for ever glorified and admired in them.

2. She is very confident of her own interest in him (v. 3): "*I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine*; the relation is mutual, and the knot is tied, which cannot be loosed; *for he feeds among the lilies*, and my communion with him is a certain token of my interest in him." She had said this before (ch. 2:16); but, (1.) Here she repeats it as that which she resolved to abide by, and which she took an unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction in; she liked her choice too well to change. Our communion with God is very much maintained and kept up by the frequent renewing of our covenant with him and rejoicing in it. (2.) She had occasion to repeat it, for she had acted unkindly to her beloved, and, for her so doing, he had justly withdrawn himself from

her, and therefore there was occasion to take fresh hold of the covenant, which continues firm between Christ and believes, notwithstanding their failings and his frowns, Ps. 89:30–35. "I have been careless and wanting in my duty, and yet *I am my beloved's*;" for every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant. "He has justly hidden his face from me and denied me his comforts, and yet *my beloved is mine*;" for rebukes and chastenings are not only consistent with, but they flow from covenant-love. (3.) When we have not a full assurance of Christ's love we must live by a faithful adherence to him. "Though I have not the sensible consolation I used to have, yet I will cleave to this, *Christ is mine and I am his*." (4.) Though she had said the same before, yet now she inverts the order, and asserts her interest in her first: *I am my beloved's*, entirely devoted and dedicated to him; and then her interest in him and in his grace: "*My beloved is mine*, and I am happy, truly happy in him." If our own hearts can but witness for us that we are his, there is no room left to question his being ours; for the covenant never breaks on his side. (5.) It is now her comfort, as it was then, that *he feeds among the lilies*, that he takes delight in his people and converses freely with them, as we do with those with whom we feed; and therefore, though at present he be withdrawn, "I shall meet with him again. *I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God*."

Verses 4-10

Now we must suppose Christ graciously returned to his spouse, from whom he had withdrawn himself, returned to converse with her (for he speaks to her and *makes her to hear joy and gladness*), returned to favour her, having forgiven and forgotten all her unkindness, for he speaks very tenderly and respectfully to her.

I. He pronounces her truly amiable (v. 4): *Thou art beautiful, O my love! as Tirzah*, a city in the tribe of Manasseh, whose name signifies *pleasant*, or *acceptable*, the situation, no doubt, being very happy and the building fine and uniform. *Thou art comely as Jerusalem*, a city *compact together* (Ps. 122:3), and which Solomon had built and beautified, *the joy of the whole earth*; it was an honour to the world (whether they thought so or no) that there was such a city in it. It was the holy city, and that was the greatest beauty of it; and fitly is the church compared to it, for it was figured and typified by it. The gospel-church is *the Jerusalem that is above* (Gal. 4:26), *the heavenly Jerusalem* (Heb. 12:22); in it God has *his sanctuary*, and is, in a special manner, present; thence he has the tribute of praise issuing; it is his rest for ever, and therefore it is *comely as Jerusalem*, and, being so, is *terrible as an army with banners*. Church-censures, duly administered, strike an awe upon men's consciences; the word (the weapons of her warfare) *casts down imaginations* (2 Co. 10:5), and even an unbeliever is convinced and judged by the solemnity of holy ordinances, 1 Co. 14:24, 25. The saints by faith *overcome the world* (1 Jn. 5:4); nay, like Jacob, they have *power with God and prevail*, Gen. 32:28.

II. He owns himself in love with her, v. 5. Though, for a small moment, and in a little wrath, he had hid his face from her, yet now he gathers her with very surprising instances of *everlasting lovingkindness*, Isa. 54:8. *Turn thy eyes towards me* (so some read it), "turn the eyes of faith and love towards me, *for they have lifted me up*; look unto me, and be comforted." When we are calling to God to turn the eye of his favour towards us he is calling to us to turn the eye of our obedience towards him. We read it as a strange expression of love, "*Turn away thy eyes from me, for I cannot bear the brightness of them; they have quite overcome me*, and I am prevailed with to overlook all that is past;" as God said to Moses, when he interceded for Israel, "*Let*

me alone, or I must yield," Ex. 32:10. Christ is pleased to borrow these expressions of a passionate lover only to express the tenderness of a compassionate Redeemer, and the delight he takes in his redeemed and in the workings of his own grace in them.

III. He repeats, almost word for word, part of the description he had given of her beauty (ch. 4:1-3), her *hair*, her *teeth*, her *temples* (v. 5-7), not because he could not have described it in other words, and by other similitudes, but to show that he had still the same esteem for her since her unkindness to him, and his withdrawals from her, that he had before. Lest she should think that, though he would not quite cast her off, yet he would think the worse of her while he knew her, he says the same of her now that he had done; for those *to whom much is forgiven will love the more*, and, consequently, will be the more loved, for Christ has said, *I love those that love me*. He is pleased with his people, notwithstanding their weaknesses, when they sincerely repent of them and return to their duty, and commends them as if they had already arrived at perfection.

IV. He prefers her before all competitors, and sees all the beauties and perfections of others meeting and centering in her (v. 8, 9): "*There are, it may be, threescore queens*, who, like Esther, have by their beauty attained to the royal state and dignity, *and fourscore concubines*, whom kings have preferred before their own queens, as more charming, and these attended by their maids of honour, *virgins without number*, who, when there is a ball at court, appear in great splendour, with beauty that dazzles the eyes of the spectators; but *my dove, my undefiled, is but one*, a holy one." 1. She excels them all. Go through all the world, and view the societies of men that reckon themselves wise and happy, kingdoms, courts, senates, councils, or whatever incorporations you may think valuable, they are none of them to be compared with the church of Christ; their honours and beauties are nothing to hers. *Who is like unto thee, O Israel!* Deu. 33:29; 4:6, 7. There are particular persons, as *virgins without number*, who are famed for their accomplishments, the beauties of their address, language, and performances, but the beauty of holiness is beyond all other beauty: "*My dove, my undefiled, is one*, has that one beauty that she is a dove, an undefiled dove, and mine, and that makes her excel the queens and virgins, though they were ever so many." 2. She included them all. "Other kings have many queens, and concubines, and virgins, with whose conversation they entertain themselves, but *my dove, my undefiled*, is to me instead of all; in that one I have more than they have in all theirs." Or, "Though there are many particular churches, some of greater dignity, others of less, some of longer, others of shorter, standing, and many particular believers, of different gifts and attainments, some more eminent, others less so, yet they all constitute but one catholic church, are all but parts of that whole, and that is *my dove, my undefiled*." Christ is the centre of the church's unity; all the children of God that are scattered abroad are gathered by him (Jn. 11:52), and meet in him (Eph. 1:10), and are all his doves.

V. He shows how much she was esteemed, not by him only, but by all that had acquaintance with her and stood in relation to her. It would add to her praise to say, 1. That she was her mother's darling; she had that in her, from a child, which recommended her to the particular affection of her parents. As Solomon himself is said to have been *tender and an only one in the sight of his mother* (Prov. 4:3), so was she *the only one of her mother*, as dear as if she had been an only one, and, if there were many more, yet she was *the choice one of her that bore her*, more excellent than all the societies of men this world ever produced. All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, are nothing, in Christ's account, compared with the church,

which is made up of *the excellent ones of the earth, the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, and more excellent than their neighbours*. 2. That she was admired by all her acquaintance, not only *the daughters*, who were her juniors, but even *the queens and the concubines*, who might have reason to be jealous of her as a rival; *they all blessed her*, and wished well to her, *praised her*, and spoke well of her. *The daughters of Jerusalem* called her *the fairest among women*; all agreed to give her the pre-eminence for beauty, and every sheaf bowed to hers. Note, (1.) Those that have any correct sense of things cannot but be convinced in their consciences (whatever they say) that godly people are excellent people; many will give them their good word, and more their good-will. (2.) Jesus Christ takes notice what people think and speak of his church, and is well pleased with those that honour such as fear the Lord, and takes it ill of those that despise them, particularly when they are under a cloud, that *offend any of his little ones*.

VI. He produces the encomium that was given of her, and makes it his own (v. 10): *Who is she that looks forth as the morning?* This is applicable both to the church in the world and to grace in the heart.

1. They are amiable as the light, the most beautiful of all visible things. Christians are, or should be, the lights of the world. The patriarchal church *looked forth as the morning* when the promise of the Messiah was first made known, and *the day-spring from on high* visited this dark world. The Jewish church was *fair as the moon*; the ceremonial law was an imperfect light; it shone by reflection; it was changing as the moon, did not make day, nor had *the sun of righteousness yet risen*. But the Christian church is *clear as the sun*, exhibits a great *light to those that sat in darkness*. Or we may apply it to the kingdom of grace, the gospel-kingdom. (1.) In its rise, it *looks forth as the morning* after a dark night; it is discovering (Job 38:12, 13), and very acceptable, *looks forth* pleasantly as a clear morning; but it is small in its beginnings, and scarcely perceptible at first. (2.) It is, at the best, in this world, but *fair as the moon*, which shines with a borrowed light, which has her changes and eclipses, and her spots too, and, when at the full, does but rule by night. But, (3.) When it is perfected in the kingdom of glory then it will be *clear as the sun*, the church *clothed with the sun*, with Christ *the sun of righteousness*, Rev. 12:1. Those that love God will then be *as the sun when he goes forth in his strength* (Jdg. 5:31; Mt. 13:43); they shall shine in inexpressible glory, and that which is perfect will then come; there shall be no darkness, no spots, Isa. 30:26.

2. The beauty of the church and of believers is not only amiable, but *awful as an army with banners*. The church, in this world, is *as an army*, as the camp of Israel in the wilderness; its state is militant; it is in the midst of enemies, and is engaged in a constant conflict with them. Believers are soldiers in this army. It has its *banners*; the gospel of Christ is an ensign (Isa. 11:12), the love of Christ, ch. 2:4. It is marshalled, and kept in order and under discipline. It is *terrible* to its enemies as Israel in the wilderness was, Ex. 15:14. When Balaam saw Israel encamped according to their tribes, by their standards, with colours displayed, he said, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* Num. 24:5. When the church preserves her purity she secures her honour and victory; when she is *fair as the moon*, and *clear as the sun*, she is truly great and formidable.

Verses 11-13

Christ having now returned to his spouse, and the breach being entirely made up, and the falling out of these lovers being the renewing of love, Christ here gives an account both of the distance and of the reconciliation.

I. That when he had withdrawn from his church as his spouse, and did not comfort her, yet even then he had his eye upon it as his garden, which he took care of (v. 11): "*I went down into the garden of nuts, or nutmegs, to see the fruits of the valley, with complacency and concern, to see them as my own.*" When he was out of sight he was no further off than the garden, hid among the trees of the garden, in a low and dark valley; but then he was observing *how the vine flourished*, that he might do all that to it which was necessary to promote its flourishing, and might delight himself in it as a man does in a fruitful garden. He went to see whether *the pomegranates budded*. Christ observes the first beginnings of the good work of grace in the soul and the early buddings of devout affections and inclinations there, and is well pleased with them, as we are with the blossoms of the spring.

II. That yet he could not long content himself with this, but suddenly felt a powerful, irresistible, inclination in his own bosom to return to his church, as his spouse, being moved with her lamentations after him, and her languishing desire towards him (v. 12): "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; I could not any longer keep at a distance; my repentings were kindled together, and I presently resolved to fly back to the arms of my love, my dove.*" Thus Joseph made himself strange to his brethren, for a while, to chastise them for their former unkindnesses, and make trial of their present temper, till he could no longer refrain himself, but, *or ever he was aware*, burst out into tears, and said, *I am Joseph*, Gen. 45:1, 3. And now the spouse perceives, as David did (Ps. 31:22), that though she *said in her haste, I am cut off from before thy eyes*, yet, at the same time, he *heard the voice of her supplications*, and became *like the chariots of Ammi-nadib*, which were noted for their beauty and swiftness. *My soul put me into the chariots of my willing people* (so some read it), "the chariots of their faith, and hope, and love, their desires, and prayers, and expectations, which they sent after me, to fetch me back, as chariots of fire with horses of fire." Note, 1. Christ's people are, and ought to be, a willing people. 2. If they continue seeking Christ and longing after him, even when he seems to withdraw from them, he will graciously return to them in due time, perhaps sooner than they think and with a pleasing surprise. No chariots sent for Christ shall return empty. 3. All Christ's gracious returns to his people take rise from himself. It is not they, it is his own soul, that puts him into the chariots of his people; for he is gracious because he will be gracious, and loves his Israel because he would love them; not for their sakes, be it known to them.

III. That he, having returned to her, kindly courted her return to him, notwithstanding the discouragements she laboured under. Let her not despair of obtaining as much comfort as ever she had before this distance happened, but take the comfort of the return of her beloved, v. 13. Here, 1. The church is called *Shulamite*, referring either to *Solomon*, the bridegroom in type, by whose name she is called, in token of her relation to him and union with him (thus believers are called *Christians* from *Christ*), or referring to *Salem*, the place of her birth and residence, as the woman of *Shunem* is called the *Shunamite*. Heaven is the Salem whence the saints have their birth, and where they have their citizenship; those that belong to Christ, and are bound for heaven, shall be called *Shulamites*. 2. She is invited to return, and the invitation most earnestly pressed: *Return, return*; and again, "*Return, return*; recover the peace thou hast lost and forfeited; come back to thy former composedness and cheerfulness of spirit." Note, Good Christians, after they have had their comfort disturbed, are sometimes hard to be pacified, and need to be earnestly persuaded to return again to their rest. As revolting sinners have need to be called to again and again (*Turn you, turn you, why will you die?*) so disquieted saints have need to be called to again and again, *Turn you, turn you, why will you droop*;

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? 3. Having returned, she is desired to show her face: *That we may look upon thee*. Go no longer with thy face covered like a mourner. Let those that have made their peace with God *lift up their faces without spot* (Job 22:26); let them come boldly to his throne of grace. Christ is pleased with the cheerfulness and humble confidence of his people, and would have them look pleasant. "Let us *look upon thee*, not I only, but the holy angels, who rejoice in the consolation of saints as well as in the conversion of sinners; not I only, but all the daughters." Christ and believers are pleased with the beauty of the church. 4. A short account is given of what is to be seen in her. The question is asked, *What will you see in the Shulamite?* And it is answered, *As it were the company of two armies*. (1.) Some think she gives this account of herself; she is shy of appearing, unwilling to be looked upon, having, in her own account, no form or comeliness. Alas! says she, *What will you see in the Shulamite?* nothing that is worth your looking upon, nothing but *as it were the company of two armies* actually engaged, where nothing is to be seen but blood and slaughter. The watchmen had smitten her, and wounded her, and she carried in her face the marks of those wounds, looked as if she had been fighting. She had said (ch. 1:6), *Look not upon me because I am black*; here she says, "Look not upon me because I am bloody." Or it may denote the constant struggle that is between grace and corruption in the souls of believers; they are in them *as two armies* continually skirmishing, which makes her ashamed to show her face. (2.) Others think her beloved gives the account of her. "I will tell you what you shall *see in the Shulamite*; you shall see as noble a sight as that of two armies, or two parts of the same army, drawn out in rank and file; not only *as an army with banners*, but *as two armies*, with a majesty double to what was before spoken; she is as *Mahanaim*, as the two hosts which Jacob saw (Gen. 32:1, 2), a host of saints and a host of angels ministering to them; the church militant, the church triumphant." Behold *two armies*; in both the church appears beautiful.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, I. Christ, the royal bridegroom, goes on to describe the beauties of his spouse, the church, in many instances, and to express his love to her and the delight he has in her conversation (v. 1-9). II. The spouse, the church, expresses her great delight in him, and the desire that she had of communion and fellowship with him (v. 10–13). Such mutual esteem and endearment are there between Christ and believers. And what is heaven but an everlasting interchanging of loves between the holy God and holy souls!

Verses 1-9

The title which Jesus Christ here gives to the church is new: *O prince's daughter!* agreeing with Ps. 45:13, where she is called *the king's daughter*. She is so in respect of her new birth, born from above, begotten of God, and his workmanship, bearing the image of the King of kings, and guided by his Spirit. She is so by marriage; Christ, by betrothing her to himself, though he found her mean and despicable, has made her a *prince's daughter*. She has a princely disposition, something in her truly noble and generous; she is daughter and heir to the prince of the kings of the earth. *If children, then heirs*. Now here we have, I. A copious description of the beauty of the spouse, which, some think, is given by the virgins her companions, and that those were they who called upon her to return; it seems rather to be given by Christ himself, and to be designed to express his love to her and delight in her, as before, ch. 4:1, etc., and ch. 6:5, 6. The similitudes are here different from what they were before, to show that the beauty of holiness is such as nothing in nature can reach; you may still say more of it, and yet still come short of it. That commendation of the spouse, ch. 4, was immediately upon the espousals (ch. 3:11), this upon her return from a by-path (ch. 6:13); yet this exceeds that, to show the constancy of Christ's love to his people; *he loves them to the end*, since he made them *precious in his sight and honourable*. The spouse had described the beauty of her beloved in ten particulars (ch. 5:11, etc.); and now he describes her in as many, for he will not be behindhand with her in respects and endearments. Those that honour Christ he will certainly honour, and make honourable. As the prophet, in describing the corruptions of degenerate Israel, reckons *from the sole of the foot even unto the head* (Isa. 1:6), so here the beauties of the church are reckoned from foot to head, that, as the apostle speaks, when he is comparing the church, as here, to the natural body (1 Co. 12:23), *more abundant honour* might be bestowed on those parts *of the body which we think to be less honourable*, and which therefore *lacked honour*, v. 24. 1. Her *feet* are here praised; the feet of Christ's ministers are beautiful in the eyes of the church (Isa. 52:7), and her feet are here said to be beautiful in the eyes of Christ. *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!* When believers, being made free from the captivity of sin (Acts 12:8), *stand fast in the liberty with which they are made free*, preserve the tokens of their enfranchisement, have *their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*, and walk steadily according to the rule of the gospel, then their *feet are beautiful with shoes*; they tread firmly, being well armed against the troubles they meet with in their way. When we rest not in good affections, but they are accompanied with sincere endeavors and resolutions, then our feet are beautified *with shoes*. See Eze. 16:10. 2. *The joint of the thighs* are here said to be *like jewels*, and those curiously wrought by *a cunning workman*. This is explained by Eph. 4:16 and Col. 2:19, where the mystical body of Christ is said to be held together

by *joints and bands*, as the hips and knees (both which are *the joints of the thighs*) serve the natural body in its strength and motion. The church is *then* comely in Christ's eyes when those joints are kept firm by holy love and unity, and the communion of saints. When believers act in religion from good principles, and are steady and regular in their whole conversation, and turn themselves easily to every duty in its time and place, then *the joints are like jewels*. 3. The *navel* is here compared to a round cup or *goblet*, that *wants not* any of the agreeable *liquor* that one would wish to find in it, such as David's cup that ran over (Ps. 23:5), well shaped, and not as that miserable infant whose navel was not cut, Eze. 16:4. The fear of the Lord is said to be *health to the navel*. See Prov. 3:8. When the soul wants not that fear then the *navel wants not liquor*. 4. The *belly is like a heap of wheat* in the store-chamber, which perhaps was sometimes, to make show, adorned with flowers. The *wheat* is useful, the *lilies* are beautiful; there is every thing in the church which may be to the members of that body either for use or for ornament. All the body is nourished from the *belly*; it denotes the spiritual prosperity of a believer and the healthful constitution of the soul all in good plight. 5. The *breasts are like two young roes that are twins*, v. 3. By the breasts of the church's consolations those are nourished who are born from its belly (Isa. 46:3), and by the navel received nourishment in the womb. This comparison we had before, ch. 4:5. 6. The *neck*, which before was compared to *the tower of David* (ch. 4:4), is here compared to *a tower of ivory*, so white, so precious; such is the faith of the saints, by which they are joined to Christ their head. The name of the Lord, improved by faith, is to the saints as a strong and impregnable tower. 7. The *eyes* are compared to *the fish-pools in Heshbon*, or the artificial fish-ponds, *by a gate*, either of Jerusalem or Heshbon, which is called *Bath-rabbim*, the daughter of a multitude, because a great thoroughfare. The understanding, the intentions of a believer, are clean and clear as these ponds. The eyes, weeping for sin, are as fountains (Jer. 9:1), and comely with Christ. 8. The *nose* is like *the tower of Lebanon*, the forehead or face set *like a flint* (Isa. 50:7), undaunted as that tower was impregnable. So it denotes the magnanimity and holy bravery of the church, or (as others) a spiritual sagacity to discern things that differ, as animals strangely distinguish by the smell. This tower *looks towards Damascus*, the head city of Syria, denoting the boldness of the church in facing its enemies and not fearing them. 9. The *head like Carmel*, a very high hill near the sea, v. 5. The head of a believer is *lifted up above his enemies* (Ps. 27:6), above the storms of the lower region, as the top of Carmel was, pointing heaven-ward. The more we get above this world, and the nearer to heaven, and the more secure and serene we become by that means, the more amiable we are in the eyes of the Lord Jesus. 10. *The hair of the head* is said to be *like purple*. This denotes the universal amiableness of a believer in the eyes of Christ, even to *the hair*, or (as some understand it) the pins with which *the hair* is dressed. Some by *the head and the hair* understand the governors of the church, who, if they be careful to do their duty, add much to her comeliness. *The head like crimson* (so some read it) *and the hair like purple*, the two colours worn by great men.

II. The complacency which Christ takes in his church thus beautified and adorned. She is lovely indeed if she be so in his eyes; as he puts the comeliness upon her, so it is his love that makes this comeliness truly valuable, for he is an unexceptionable judge. 1. He delighted to look upon his church, and to converse with it, rejoicing in that habitable part of his earth: *The king is held in the galleries*, and cannot leave them. This is explained by Ps. 132:13, 14, *The Lord has chosen Zion*, saying, *This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell*; and Ps. 147:11, *The Lord takes pleasure in those that fear him*. And, if Christ has such delight

in the galleries of communion with his people, much more reason have they to delight in them, and to reckon *a day there better than a thousand*. 2. He was even struck with admiration at the beauty of his church (v. 6): *How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love! How art thou made fair!* (so the word is), "not born so, but made so with the comeliness which I have put upon thee." Holiness is a beauty beyond expression; the Lord Jesus is wonderfully pleased with it; the outward aspect of it is fair; the inward disposition of it is pleasant and highly agreeable, and the complacency he has in it is inexpressible. *O my dearest for delights!* so some read. 3. He determined to keep up communion with his church. (1.) To *take hold of her* as of *the boughs of a palm-tree*. He compares her *stature to a palm-tree* (v. 7), so straight, so strong, does she appear, when she is looked upon in her full proportion. The *palm-tree* is observed to flourish most when it is loaded; so the church, the more it has been afflicted, the more it has multiplied; and the branches of it are emblems of victory. Christ says, "*I will go up to the palm-tree*, to entertain myself with the shadow of it (v. 8) and *I will take hold of its boughs* and observe the beauty of them." What Christ has said he will do, in favour to his people; we may be sure he will do it, for his kind purposes are never suffered to fall to the ground; and if he *take hold of the boughs* of his church, take early hold of her branches, when they are young and tender, he will keep his hold and not let them go. (2.) To refresh himself with her fruits. He compares her *breasts* (her pious affections towards him) *to clusters of grapes*, a most pleasant fruit (v. 7), and he repeats it (v. 8): *They shall be* (that is, they shall be to me) *as clusters of the vine*, which *make glad the heart*. "Now that I come *up to the palm-tree* thy graces shall be exerted and excited." Christ's presence with his people kindles the holy heavenly fire in their souls, and then their *breasts shall be as clusters of the vine*, a cordial to themselves and acceptable to him. And since God, at first, *breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life*, and breathes the breath of the new life still, *the smell of their nostrils is like the smell of apples*, or oranges, which is pleasing and reviving. *The Lord smelt a sweet savour* from Noah's sacrifice, Gen. 8:21. And, *lastly, the roof of her mouth is like the best wine* (v. 9); her spiritual taste and relish, or the words she speaks of God and man, which come not from the teeth outward, but from *the roof of the mouth*, these are pleasing to God. *The prayer of the upright is his delight*. And, when *those that fear the Lord speak one to another* as becomes them, *the Lord hearkens, and hears with pleasure*, Mal. 3:16. It is like that wine which is, [1.] Very palatable and grateful to the taste. It *goes down sweetly*; it *goes straightly* (so the margin reads it); it *moves itself aright*, Prov. 23:31. The pleasures of sense seem right to the carnal appetite, and go down smoothly, but they are often wrong, and, compared with the pleasure of communion with God, they are harsh and rough. Nothing *goes down so sweetly* with a gracious soul as the wine of God's consolations. [2.] It is a great cordial. The presence of Christ by his Spirit with him people shall be reviving and refreshing to them, as that strong wine which makes *the lips even of those that are asleep* (that are ready to faint away in a deliquium), *to speak*. Unconverted sinners are asleep; saints are often drowsy, and listless, and half asleep; but the word and Spirit of Christ will put life and vigour into the soul, and *out of the abundance of the heart* that is thus filled *the mouth will speak*. When the apostles were filled with the Spirit they spoke *with tongues the wonderful works of God* (Acts 2:10, 12); and those who in opposition to being *drunk with wine, wherein is excess*, are *filled with the Spirit, speak to themselves in psalms and hymns*, Eph. 5:18, 19. When Christ is thus commending the sweetness of his spouse's love, excited by the manifestation of his, she seems to put in that word, *for my beloved*, as in a parenthesis. "Is there

any thing in me that is pleasant or valuable? As it is from, so it is for my beloved." *Then* he delights in our good affections and services, when they are all for him and devoted to his glory.

Verses 10-13

These are the words of the spouse, the church, the believing soul, in answer to the kind expressions of Christ's love in the foregoing verses.

I. She here triumphs in her relation to Christ and her interest in him, and in his name will she boast all the day long. With what a transport of joy and holy exultation does she say (v. 10), "*I am my beloved's*, not my own, but entirely devoted to him and owned by him." If we can truly say that Christ is our *best beloved*, we may be confident that we are his and he *will save us*, Ps. 119:94. The gracious discoveries of Christ's love to us should engage us greatly to rejoice in the hold he has of us, his sovereignty over us and property in us, which is no less a spring of comfort than a bond of duty. Intimacy of communion with Christ should help clear up our interest in him. Glorifying in this, that she is his, to serve him, and reckoning that her honour, she comforts herself with this, that his *desire is towards her*, that is, he is her husband; it is a periphrasis of the conjugal relation, Gen. 3:16. Christ's desire was strongly towards his chosen remnant, when he came from heaven to earth to seek and save them; and when, in pursuance of his undertaking, he was even straitened till the baptism of blood he was to pass through for them *was accomplished*, Lu. 12:50. He desired *Zion for a habitation*; this is a comfort to believers that, whosoever slights them, Christ has a desire towards them, such a desire as will again bring him from heaven to earth to receive them to himself; for he longs to have them all with him, Jn. 17:24; 14:3.

II. She humbly and earnestly desires communion with him (v. 11, 12): "*Come, my beloved*, let us take a walk together, that I may receive counsel, instruction, and comfort from thee, and may make known my wants and grievances to thee, with freedom, and without interruption." Thus Christ can walk with the two disciples that were going to the village called *Emmaus*, and talked with them, till he made their *hearts burn within them*. Observe here, 1. Having received fresh tokens of his love, and full assurances of her interest in him, she presses forward towards further acquaintance with him; as blessed Paul, who desired yet more and more of *the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*, Phil. 3:8. Christ has made it to appear how much his desire is towards us, and we are very ungrateful if ours be not towards him. Note, Communion with Christ is that which all that are sanctified earnestly breathe after; and the clearer discoveries he makes to them of his love the more earnestly do they desire it. Sensual pleasures pall the carnal appetite, and soon give it surfeit, but spiritual delights whet the desires, the language of which is, *Nothing more than God*, but still *more and more of him*. Christ had said, *I will go up to the palm-tree*. Come, saith she, *Let us go*. The promises Christ has made us of communion with him are not to supersede, but quicken and encourage, our prayers for that communion. 2. She desires to go forth into the fields and villages to have this communion with him. Those that would converse with Christ must go forth from the world and the amusements of it, must avoid every thing that would divert the mind and be a hindrance to it when it should be wholly taken up with Christ; we must contrive how to *attend upon the Lord without distraction* (1 Co. 7:35), for therefore the spouse here covets to get out of the noise of the town. *Let us go forth to him without the camp*, Heb. 14:13. Solitude and retirement befriend communion with God; therefore *Isaac went out into the field to*

meditate and pray. *Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door.* A believer is never less alone than when alone with Christ, where no eye sees. 3. Having business to go abroad, to look after their grounds, she desires the company of her beloved. Note, Wherever we are, we may keep up our communion with God, if it be not our own fault, for he is always at our right hand, his eye always upon us, and both his word and his ear always nigh us. By going about our worldly affairs with heavenly holy hearts, mixing pious thoughts with common actions, and having our eyes ever towards the Lord, we may take Christ along with us whithersoever we go. Nor should we go any whither where we cannot in faith ask him to go along with us. 4. She is willing to rise betimes, to go along with her beloved: *Let us get up early to the vineyards.* It intimates her care to improve opportunities of conversing with her beloved; when the time appointed has come, we must lose no time, but, as the woman (Mk. 16:2), *go very early*, though it be to a *sepulchre*, if we be in hopes to meet him there. Those that will go abroad with Christ must begin betimes with him, early in the morning of their days, must begin every day with him, seek him early, seek him diligently. 5. She will be content to take up her lodging in the villages, the huts or cottages which the country people built for their shelter when they attended their business in the fields; there, in these mean and cold dwellings, she will gladly reside, if she may but have her beloved with her. His presence will make them fine and pleasant, and convert them into palaces. A gracious soul can reconcile itself to the poorest accommodations, if it may have communion with God in them. 6. The most pleasant delightful fields, even in the spring-time, when the country is most pleasant, will not satisfy her, unless she have her beloved with her. No delights on earth can make a believer easy, unless he enjoy God in all.

III. She desires to be better acquainted with the state of her own soul and the present posture of its affairs (v. 12): *Let us see if the vine flourish.* Our own souls are our vineyards; they are, or should be, planted with vines and pomegranates, choice and useful trees. We are made keepers of these vineyards, and therefore are concerned often to look into them, to examine the state of our own souls, to seek whether the *vine flourishes*, whether our graces be in act and exercise, whether we be fruitful in the fruits of righteousness, and whether our fruit abound. And especially let us enquire whether *the tender grape appear* and whether *the pomegranates bud forth*, what good motions and dispositions there are in us that are yet but young and tender, that they may be protected and cherished with a particular care, and may not be nipped, or blasted, or rubbed off, but cultivated, that they may bring forth fruit unto perfection. In this enquiry into our own spiritual state, it will be good to take Christ along with us, because his presence will make the *vine flourish* and the *tender grape appear*, as the returning sun revives the gardens, and because to him we are concerned to approve ourselves. If he sees the *vine flourish*, and the *tender grape appear*—if we can appeal to him, *Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*,—if his Spirit witness with our spirit that our souls prosper, it is enough. And, if we would be acquainted with ourselves, we must beg of him to search and try us, to help us in the search, and discover us to ourselves.

IV. She promises to her beloved the best entertainment she can give him at her country seat; for he will come in to us, and sup with us, Rev. 3:20. 1. She promises him her best affections; and, whatever else she had for him, it would utterly be contemned if her heart were not entire for him: *"There therefore will I give thee my love;* I will repeat the professions of it, honour thee with the tokens of it; and the out-goings of my soul towards thee in adorations and desires shall be quickened and enlarged,

and my heart offered up to thee in a holy fire." 2. She promises him her best provision, v. 13. "There we shall find pleasant odours, for *the mandrakes give a smell;*" the *love-flowers* or *lovely ones* (so the word signifies), or the *love-fruits*; it was something that was in all respects very grateful, so valuable that Rachel and Leah had like to have fallen out above it, Gen. 30:14. "We shall also find that which is good for food, as well as pleasant to the eye, all the rarities that the country affords: *At our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits.*" Note, (1.) The fruits and exercises of grace are pleasant to the Lord Jesus. (2.) These must be carefully laid up for him, devoted to his service and honour, must be always ready to us when we have occasion for them, as that which is laid up at our gates, that, by our bringing forth much fruit, he may be glorified, Jn. 15:18. (3.) There is a great variety of these pleasant fruits, with which our souls should be well stocked; we must have all sorts of them, grace for all occasions, *new and old*, as the good householder has in his treasury, not only the products of this year, but remainders of the last, Mt. 13:52. We must not only have that ready to us, for the service of Christ, which we have heard, and learned, and experienced lately, but must retain that which we have formerly gathered; nor must we content ourselves only with what we have laid up in store in the days of old, but, as long as we live, must be still adding something new to it, that our stock may increase, and we may be *thoroughly furnished for every good work*. (4.) Those that truly love Christ will think all they have, even their most *pleasant fruits*, and what they have treasured up most carefully, too little to be bestowed upon him, and he is welcome to it all; if it were more and better, it should be at his service. It is all from him, and therefore it is fit it should be all for him.

Chapter 8

The affections between Christ and his spouse are as strong and lively here, in this closing chapter of the song, as ever, and rather more so. I. The spouse continues her importunity for a more intimate communion and fellowship with him (v. 1-3). II. She charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to interrupt her communion with her beloved (v. 4); and they, thereupon, admire her dependence on him (v. 5). III. She begs of her beloved, whom she raises up by her prayers (v. 5), that he would by his grace confirm that blessed union with him to which she was admitted (v. 6, 7). IV. She makes intercession for others also, that care might be taken of them (v. 8, 9), and pleases herself with the thoughts of her own interest in Christ and his affection to her (v. 10). V. She owns herself his tenant for a vineyard she held of him at Baal-hamon (v. 11, 12). VI. The song concludes with an interchanging of parting requests. Christ charges his spouse that she should often let him hear from her (v. 13), and she begs of him that he would hasten his return to her (v. 14).

Verses 1-4

Here, I. The spouse wishes for a constant intimacy and freedom with the Lord Jesus. She was already betrothed to him, but, the nuptials being yet not solemnized and published (the bride, the Lamb's wife, will not be completely ready till his second coming), she was obliged to be shy and to keep at some distance; she therefore wishes she may be taken for his sister, he having called her so (ch. 5:1), and that she might have the same chaste and innocent familiarity with him that a sister has with a brother, an own brother, that *sucked the breasts* of the same *mother* with her, who would therefore be exceedingly tender of her, as Joseph was of his brother Benjamin. Some make this to be the prayer of the Old-Testament saints for the hastening of Christ's incarnation, that the church might be the better acquainted with him, when, *forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he should also himself likewise take part of the same, and not be ashamed to call them brethren. It is rather the wish of all believers for a more intimate communion with him, that they might *receive the Spirit of sanctification*, and so Christ must be as their brother, that is, that they might be as his brethren, which *then* they are when by grace they are made partakers of a divine nature, and *he that sanctifies, and those that are sanctified, are both of one*, Heb. 2:11, etc. It becomes brethren and sisters, the children of the same parents, that have been nursed at the same breast, to be very loving to and tender of one another; such a love the spouse desires might be between her and her beloved, that she might call him brother. 2. She promises herself then the satisfaction of making a more open profession of her relation to him than at present she could make: "*When I should find thee without, any where, even before company, I would kiss thee*, as a sister does her own brother, especially her little brother that is now *sucking the breasts of her mother*" (for so some understand it); "I would use all the decent freedom with thee that could be, and *should not be despised* for it, as doing any thing unbecoming the modesty of my sex." The church, since Christ's incarnation, can better own him than she could before, when she would have been laughed at for being so much in love with one that was not yet born. Christ has become as our brother; wherever we find him, therefore, let us be ready to own our relation to him and affection for him, and not fear being despised for it, nor regard that any more than David did when he danced before the ark. *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*. Nay, let us hope that we shall not be

despised so much as some imagine. *Of the maid-servants of whom thou hast spoken I shall be had in honour.* Wherever we find the image of Christ, though it be without, among those that do not follow him with us, we must love it, and testify that love, and we *shall not be despised* for it, but catholic charity will gain us respect. 3. She promises to improve the opportunity she should then have for cultivating an acquaintance with him (v. 2): "*I would lead thee, as my brother, by the arm, and hang upon thee; I would show thee all the house of my precious things, would bring thee into my mother's house, into the church, into the solemn assemblies (ch. 3:4), into my closet*" (for there the saints have most familiar communion with Christ), "*and there thou wouldst instruct me*" (so some read it), as brethren inform their sisters of what they desire to be instructed in. Those that know Christ shall be taught of him; and *therefore* we should desire communion with Christ that we may receive instruction from him. He has come that he might give us an understanding. Or, "My mother would instruct me when I have thee with me." It is the presence of Christ in and with his church that makes the word and ordinances instructive to her children, who shall all be taught of God. 4. She promises him to bid him welcome to the best she had; she would *cause him to drink of her spiced wine and the juice of her pomegranate*, and bid him welcome to it, wishing it better for his sake. The exercise of grace and the performance of duty are spiced wine to the Lord Jesus, very acceptable to him, as expressive of a grateful sense of his favours. Those that are pleased with Christ must study to be pleasing to him; and they will not find him hard to be pleased. He reckons hearty welcome his best entertainment; and, if he have that, he will bring his entertainment along with him. 5. She doubts not but to experience his tender care of her and affection to her (v. 3), that she should be supported by his power and kept from fainting in the hardest services and sufferings (*His left hand shall be under my head*) and that she should be comforted with his love—*His right hand should embrace me*. Thus Christ laid his right hand upon John when he was ready to die away, Rev. 1:17. See also Dan. 10:10, 18. It may be read as it is ch. 2:6, *His left hand is under my head* (for the words are the same in the original) and so it expresses an immediate answer to her prayer; she was answered with *strength in her soul*, Ps. 138:3. While we are following hard after Christ his *right hand sustains us*, Ps. 63:8. *Underneath are the everlasting arms*. 6. She charges those about her to take heed of doing any thing to interrupt the pleasing communion she now had with her beloved (v. 4), as she had done before, when he thus strengthened and comforted her with his presence (ch 2:7): Let me *charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem*, and reason with you, *Why should you stir up, and why should you awake, my love, until he will?* The church, our common mother, charges all her children that they never do any thing to provoke Christ to withdraw, which we are very prone to do. Why should you put such an affront upon him? Why should you be such enemies to yourselves? We should thus reason with ourselves when we are tempted to do that which will grieve the Spirit. "What! Am I weary of Christ's presence, that I affront him and provoke him to depart from me? Why should I do that which he will take so unkindly and which I shall certainly repent of?"

Verses 5-7

Here, I. The spouse is much admired by those about her. It comes in in a parenthesis, but in it gospel-grace lies as plain, and as much above ground, as any where in this mystical song: *Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?* Some make these the words of the bridegroom, expressing himself well pleased with her reliance on him and

resignation of herself to his guidance. They are rather the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she spoke (v. 4); they see her, and bless her. The angels in heaven, and all her friends on earth, are the joyful spectators of her bliss. The Jewish church came up from the wilderness supported by the divine power and favour, Deu. 32:10, 11. The Christian church was raised up from a low and desolate condition by the grace of Christ relied on, Gal. 4:27. Particular believers are amiable, nay, admirable, and divine grace is to be admired in them, when by the power of that grace they are brought *up from the wilderness, leaning* with a holy confidence and complacency *upon* Jesus Christ *their beloved*. This bespeaks the beauty of a soul, and the wonders of divine grace, 1. In the conversion of sinners. A sinful state is a *wilderness*, remote from communion with God, barren and dry, and in which there is no true comfort; it is a wandering wanting state. Out of this wilderness we are concerned to *come up*, by true repentance, in the strength of the grace of Christ, supported by our beloved and carried in his arms. 2. In the consolation of saints. A soul convinced of sin, and truly humbled for it, is in a *wilderness*, quite at a loss; and there is no coming out of this *wilderness* but *leaning* on Christ as our beloved, by faith, and not *leaning to our own understanding*, nor trusting to any righteousness or strength of our own as sufficient for us, but going forth, and going on, in the strength of the Lord God, and making mention of his righteousness, even his only, who is *the Lord our righteousness*. 3. In the salvation of those that belong to Christ. We must go up from the wilderness of this world having our conversation in heaven; and, at death, we must remove thither, *leaning* upon Christ, must live and die by faith in him. *To me to live is Christ*, and it is he that is gain in death.

II. She addresses herself to her beloved.

1. She puts him in mind of the former experience which she and others had had of comfort and success in applying to him. (1.) For her own part: *"I raised thee up under the apple tree*, that is, I have many a time wrestled with thee by prayer and have prevailed. When I was alone in the acts of devotion, retired in the orchard, under *the apple-tree*" (which Christ himself was compared to, ch. 2:3), as *Nathanael under the fig-tree* (Jn. 1:48), "meditating and praying, then *I raised thee up*, to help me and comfort me," as the disciples raised him up in the storm, saying, *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* (Mk. 4:38), and the church (Ps. 44:23), *Awake, why sleepest thou?* Note, The experience we have had of Christ's readiness to yield to the importunities of our faith and prayer should encourage us to continue instant in our addresses to him, to strive more earnestly, and not to faint. *I sought the Lord, and he heard me*, Ps. 34:4. (2.) Others also had like experience of comfort in Christ, as it follows there (Ps. 34:5), *They looked unto him*, as well as I, *and were lightened*. There *thy mother brought thee forth*, the universal church, or believing souls, in whom Christ was formed, Gal. 4:15. They were in pain for the comfort of an interest in thee, and *travailed in pain with great sorrow* (so the word here signifies); but they *brought thee forth*; the pangs did not continue always; those that had *travailed* in convictions at last *brought forth* in consolations, and the *pain was forgotten* for joy of the Saviour's birth. By this very similitude our Saviour illustrates the joy which his disciples would have in his return to them, after a mournful separation for a time, Jn. 16:21, 22. After the bitter pangs of repentance many a one has had the blessed birth of comfort; why then may not I?

2. She begs of him that her union with him might be confirmed, and her communion with him continued and made more

intimate (v. 6): *Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm.* (1.) "Let me have a place in thy heart, an interest in thy love." This is that which all those desire above any thing that know how much their happiness is bound up in the love of Christ. (2.) "Let me never lose the room I have in thy heart; let thy love to me be ensured, as that deed which is sealed up not to be robbed. Let nothing ever prevail either to separate me from thy love, or, by suspending the communications of it, to deprive me of the comfortable sense of it." (3.) "Let me be always near and dear to thee, as the *signet on thy right hand*, not to be parted with (Jer. 22:24), *engraven upon the palms of thy hands* (Isa. 49:14), be loved with a peculiar love." (4.) "Be thou my high priest; let my name be written on thy breast-plate, nearer thy heart, as the names of all the tribes were engraven like the engravings of a signet in twelve precious stones on the breast-plate of Aaron, and also on two precious *stones* on the *two shoulders* or arms of the ephod," Ex. 28:11, 12, 21. (5.) "Let thy power be engaged for me, as an evidence of thy love to me; let me be not only a *seal upon thy heart*, but a *seal upon thy arm*; let me be ever borne up in thy arms, and know it to my comfort." Some make these to be the words of Christ to his spouse, commanding her to be ever mindful of him and of his love to her; however, if we desire and expect that Christ should set us as a *seal on his heart*, surely we cannot do less than set him as a seal on ours.

3. To enforce this petition, she pleads the power of love, of her love to him, which constrained her to be thus pressing for the tokens of his love to her.

(1.) Love is a violent vigorous passion. [1.] It is *strong as death*. The pains of a disappointed lover are like the pains of death; nay, the pains of death are slighted, and made nothing of, in pursuit of the beloved object. Christ's love to us was *strong as death*, for it broke through death itself. *He loved us, and gave himself for us*. The love of true believers to Christ is *strong as death*, for it makes them dead to every thing else; it even parts between soul and body, while the soul, upon the wings of devout affections, soars upward to heaven, and even forgets that it is yet clothed and clogged with flesh. Paul, in a rapture of this love, knew not whether he was in *the body or out of the body*. By it a believer is crucified to the world. [2.] *Jealousy is cruel as the grave*, which swallows up and devours all; those that truly love Christ are jealous of every thing that would draw them from him, and especially jealous of themselves, lest they should do any thing to provoke him to withdraw from them, and, rather than do so, would *pluck out a right eye* and *cut off a right hand*, than which what can be more cruel? Weak and trembling saints, who conceive a jealousy of Christ, doubting of his love to them, find that jealousy to prey upon them like the grave; nothing wastes the spirits more; but it is an evidence of the strength of their love to him. (3.) *The coals thereof*, its lamps, and flames, and beams, are very strong, and burn with incredible force, as the *coals of fire that have a most vehement flame, a flame of the Lord* (so some read it), a powerful piercing flame, as the lightning, Ps. 29:7. Holy love is a fire that begets a vehement heat in the soul, and consumes the dross and chaff that are in it, melts it down like wax into a new form, and carries it upwards as the sparks towards God and heaven.

(2.) Love is a valiant victorious passion. Holy love is so; the reigning love of God in the soul is constant and firm, and will not be drawn off from him either by fair means or foul, by *life or death* Rom. 8:38. [1.] Death, and all its terrors, will not frighten a believer from loving Christ: *Many waters*, though they will quench fire, *cannot quench this love*, no, nor the *floods drown it*, v.

7. The noise of these waters will strike no terror upon it; let them do their worst, Christ shall still be the best beloved. The overflowing of these waters will strike no damp upon it, but it will enable a man to rejoice in tribulation. *Though he slay me, I will love him and trust in him.* No waters could quench Christ's love to us, nor any floods drown it; he waded through the greatest difficulties, even seas of blood. Love sat king upon the floods; let nothing then abate our love to him. [2.] Life, and all its comforts, will not entice a believer from loving Christ: *If a man could hire him with all the substance of his house,* to take his love off from Christ and set it upon the world and the flesh again, he would reject the proposal with the utmost disdain; as Christ, when the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them were offered him, to buy him off from his undertaking, said, *Get thee hence, Satan.* It would utterly be contemned. Offer those things to those that know no better. Love will enable us to repel and triumph over temptations from the smiles of the world, as much as from its frowns. Some give this sense of it: *If a man would give all the substance of his house to Christ,* as an equivalent instead of love, to excuse it, *it would be contemned.* He seeks not ours, but us, the heart, not the wealth. *If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it is nothing,* 1 Co. 13:1. Thus believers stand affected to Christ: the gifts of his providence cannot satisfy them without the assurances of his love.

Verses 8-12

Christ and his spouse having sufficiently confirmed their love to each other, and agreed it to be on both sides *strong as death* and inviolable, they are here, in these verses, like a loving husband and his wife, consulting together about their affairs, and considering what they should do. Yoke-fellows, having laid their hearts together, lay their heads together, to contrive about their relations and about their estates; and, accordingly, this happy pair are here advising with one another about a sister, and a vineyard.

I. They are here consulting about their sister, their little sister, and the disposing of her.

1. The spouse proposes her case with a compassionate concern (v. 8): *We have a little sister and she has no breasts* (she has not grown up to maturity); *what shall we do for this little sister of ours in the day that she shall be spoken for,* so as that we may do well for her? (1.) This may be understood as spoken by the Jewish church concerning the Gentile world. God has espoused the church of the Jews to himself, and she was richly endowed, but what shall become of the poor Gentiles, *the barren that has not borne, and the desolate?* Isa. 54:1. Their condition (say the pious Jews) is very deplorable and forlorn; they are *sisters*, children of the same fathers, God and Adam, but they are *little*, because not dignified with the knowledge of God; they *have no breasts*, no divine revelation, no scriptures, no ministers, no breasts of consolation drawn out to them, when they might suck, being *strangers to the covenants of promise*, no breasts of instruction themselves to draw out to their children, to nourish them, 1 Pt. 2:2. *What shall we do for them?* We can but pity them, and pray for them. Lord, what wilt thou do for them? The saints, in Solomon's time, might know, from David's psalms, that God had mercy in store for them, and they begged it might be hastened to them. Now the tables are turned; the Gentiles are betrothed to Christ, and ought to return the kindness by an equal concern for the bringing in of the Jews again, our eldest sister, that once had breasts, but now has none. If we take it in this sense, the unbelieving posterity of these pious Jews contradicted this prayer of their fathers; for, when the day came

that the Gentiles should be *spoken for* and courted to Christ, instead of considering what to do for them they plotted to do all they could against them, which filled up the measure of their iniquity, 1 Th. 2:16. Or, (2.) It may be applied to any other that belong to the election of grace, but are yet uncalled. They are remotely related to Christ and his church, and sisters to them both, *other sheep that are not of this fold*, Jn. 10:16; Acts 18:10. They *have no breasts*, none yet fashioned (Eze. 16:7), no affection to Christ, no principle of grace. *The day* will come *when they shall be spoken for*, when the chosen shall be called, shall be courted for Christ, by the ministers, the friends of the bridegroom. A blessed day it will be, a day of visitation. What shall we do, in that day, to promote the match, to conquer their coyness, and persuade them to consent to Christ and present themselves chaste virgins to him? Note, Those that through grace are brought to Christ themselves should contrive what they may do to help others to him, to carry on the great design of his gospel, which is to espouse souls to Christ and convert sinners to him from whom they have departed.

2. Christ soon determines what to do in this case, and his spouse agrees with him in it (v. 9): "*If she be a wall*, if the good work be once begun with the Gentiles, with the souls that are to be called in, if the *little sister*, *when she shall be spoken for* by the gospel, will but receive the word, and build herself upon Christ the foundation, and frame her doings to turn to the Lord, as the wall is in order to the house, *we will build upon her a palace of silver*, or build her up into such a palace; we will carry on the good work that is begun, till the wall become a palace, the wall of stone a palace of silver," which goes beyond the boast of Augustus Caesar, that what he found brick he left marble. This *little sister*, when once she is joined to the Lord, shall be made to *grow into a holy temple, a habitation of God through the Spirit*, Eph. 2:21, 22. *If she be a door*, when this palace comes to be finished, and the doors of this wall set up, which was the last thing done (Neh. 7:1), then *we will enclose here with boards of cedar*; we will carefully and effectually protect her, that she shall receive no damage. *We will* do it; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all concur in contriving, carrying on, and crowning, the blessed work when the time comes. Whatever is wanting shall be set in order, and the work of faith shall be fulfilled with power. Though the beginnings of grace be small, the latter end shall greatly increase. The church is in care concerning those that are yet uncalled. "Let me alone," says Christ; "I will do all that which is necessary to be done for them. Trust me with it."

3. The spouse takes this occasion to acknowledge with thankfulness his kindness to her, v. 10. She is very willing to trust him with her *little sister*, for she herself had had great experience of his grace, and, for her part, she owed her all to him: *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers*. This she speaks, not as upbraiding her little sister that had no breasts, but comforting her concerning her, that he who had made her what she was, who had built her up upon himself and made her to grow up to maturity, could and would do the same kindness for those whose case she bore upon her heart. *Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour*. See, (1.) What she values herself upon, her having found favour in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Those are happy, truly happy, and for ever so, that have the favour of God and are accepted of him. (2.) How she ascribes the good work of God in her to the good-will of God towards her: "He has *made me a wall and my breasts as towers*, and then, in that instance more than in any thing, I experienced his love to me." *Hail, thou that art highly favoured*, for in thee Christ is formed. (3.) What pleasure God takes in the work of his own hands. When we are made as a *wall*, as a *brazen wall* (Jer. 1:18; 15:20),

that stands firmly against *the blast of the terrible ones* (Isa. 25:4), then God takes delight in us to do us good. (4.) With what joy and triumph we ought to speak of God's grace towards us, and with what satisfaction we should look back upon the special times and seasons when *we were in his eyes as those that find favour*; these were days never to be forgotten.

II. They are here consulting about *a vineyard* they had in the country, the church of Christ on earth considered under the notion of *a vineyard* (v. 11, 12): *Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon*, had a kingdom in the possession of a multitude, a numerous people. As he was a type of Christ, so his vineyard was a type of the church of Christ. Our Saviour has given us a key to these verses in the parable of the vineyard let out to the unthankful husbandmen, Mt. 21:33. The bargain was that, every one of the tenants having so much of the vineyard assigned him as would contain 1000 vines, he was to pay the annual rent of 1000 *pieces of silver*; for we read (Isa. 7:23) that in a fruitful soil there were 1000 *vines at 1000 silverlings*. Observe, 1. Christ's church is his vineyard, a pleasant and peculiar place, privileged with many honours; he delights to walk in it, as a man in his vineyard, and is pleased with its fruits. 2. He has entrusted each of us with his vineyard, as *keepers* of it. The privileges of the church are that good thing which he has committed to us, to be kept as a sacred trust. The service of the church is to be our business, according as our capacity is. *Son, go work to-day in my vineyard*. Adam, in innocency, was *to dress the garden, and to keep it*. 3. He expects rent from those that are employed in his vineyard and entrusted with it. *He comes, seeking fruit*, and requires gospel-duty of all those that enjoy gospel-privileges. Every one, of what rank or degree soever, must bring glory and honour to Christ, and do some service to the interest of his kingdom in the world, in consideration of what benefit and advantage they enjoy by their share of the privileges of the vineyard. 4. Though Christ has *let out his vineyard to keepers*, yet still it is his, and he has his eye always upon it for good; for, if he did not watch over it *night and day* (Isa. 27:1, 2), *the watchmen*, to whom he has let it out, would keep it *but in vain*, Ps. 127:1. Some take these for Christ's words (v. 12): *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me*; and they observe how he dwells upon his property in it: It is *my vineyard, which is mine*; so dear is his church to him, it is *his own in the world* (Jn. 13:1), and therefore he will always have it under his protection; it is his own, and he will look after it. 5. The church, that enjoys the privileges of the vineyard, must have them always before her. The keeping of the vineyard requires constant care and diligence. They are rather the words of the spouse: *My vineyard, which is mine, is before me*. She has lamented her fault and folly in not keeping her *own vineyard* (ch. 1:6), but now she resolves to reform. Our hearts are our vineyards, which we must *keep with all diligence*; and therefore we must have a watchful jealous eye upon them at all times. 6. Our great care must be to pay our rent for what we hold of Christ's vineyard, and to see that we do not go behind-hand, nor disappoint the messengers he sends to *receive the fruits* (Mt. 21:34): *Thou, O Solomon! must have 1000, and shalt have*. The main of the profits belong to Christ; to him and his praise all our fruits must be dedicated. 7. If we be careful to give Christ the praise of our church-privileges, we may then take to ourselves the comfort and benefit of them. If the owner of the vineyard have had his due, the keepers of it shall be well paid for their cares and pains; they shall have 200, which sum, no doubt, was looked upon as a good profit. Those that work for Christ are working for themselves, and shall be unspeakable gainers by it.

Verses 13-14

Christ and his spouse are here parting for a while; she must stay below *in the gardens* on earth, where she has work to do for him; he must remove to *the mountains of spices* in heaven, where he has business to attend for her, as *an advocate with the Father*. Now observe with what mutual endearments they part.

I. He desires to hear often from her. She is ready at her pen; she must be sure to write to him; she knows how to direct (v. 13): "*Thou that, for the present, dwellest in the gardens, dressing and keeping them till thou remove from the garden below to the paradise above—thou, O believer! whoever thou art, that dwellest in the gardens of solemn ordinances, in the gardens of church-fellowship and communion, the companions are so happy as to hear thy voice, cause me to hear it too.*" Observe, 1. Christ's friends should keep a good correspondence one with another, and, as dear companions, speak often to one another (Mal. 3:16) and hearken to one another's voice; they should edify, encourage, and respect one another. They are companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ, and therefore, as fellow-travellers, should keep up mutual freedom, and not be shy of, nor strange to, one another. *The communion of saints* is an article of our covenant, as well as an article of our creed, *to exhort one another daily*, and be glad to be exhorted by another. *Hearken to the voice* of the church, as far as it agrees with the voice of Christ; his companions will do so. 2. In the midst of our communion with one another we must not neglect our communion with Christ, but let him see our countenance and hear our voice; he here bespeaks it: "*The companions hearken to thy voice; it is a pleasure to them; cause me to hear it.* Thou makest thy complaints to them when any thing grieves thee; why does thou not bring them to me, and let me hear them? Thou art free with them; be as free with me; pour out thy heart to me." Thus Christ, when he left his disciples, ordered them to send to him upon every occasion. *Ask, and you shall receive*. Note, Christ not only accepts and answers, but even courts his people's prayers, not reckoning them a trouble to him, but an honour and a *delight*, Prov. 15:8. *We cause him to hear* our prayers when we not only pray, but wrestle and strive in prayer. He loves to be pressingly importuned, which is not the manner of men. Some read it, "*Cause me to be heard; thou hast often an opportunity of speaking to thy companions, and they hearken to what thou sayest; speak of me to them; let my name be heard among them; let me be the subject of thy discourse.*" "One word of Christ" (as archbishop Usher used to say) "before you part." No subject is more becoming, or should be more pleasing.

II. She desires his speedy return to her (v. 14): *Make haste, my beloved, to come again, and receive me to thyself; be thou like a roe, or a young hart, upon the mountains of spices; let no time be lost; it is pleasant dwelling here in the gardens, but to depart, and be with thee, is far better; that therefore is what I wish, and wait, and long for. Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.* Observe, 1. Though Jesus Christ be now retired, he will return. The heavens, those high *mountains of sweet spices*, must *contain him till the times of refreshing shall come*; and those times will come, *when every eye shall see him*, in all the pomp and power of the upper and better world, the mystery of God being finished and the mystical body completed. 2. True believers, as they are looking for, so they are hastening to, the coming of that *day of the Lord*, not that they would have him make more haste than good speed, but that the intermediate counsels may all be fulfilled, and then that the end may come—the sooner the better. Not that they think him *slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness*, but thus they express the strength of their affections to him and the vastness of their expectations from him when he comes again. 3. Those only that can

in sincerity call Christ their *beloved*, their *best beloved*, can, upon good grounds, desire him to hasten his second coming. As for those whose hearts go a whoring after the world, and who set their affections on the things of the earth, they cannot love his appearing, but dread it rather, because then the earth, and all the things of it which they have chosen for their portion, will be burnt up. But those that truly love Christ long for his second coming, because it will be the crown both of his glory and their bliss. 4. The comfort and satisfaction which we sometimes have in communion with God in grace here should make us breathe the more earnestly after the immediate vision and complete fruition of him in the kingdom of glory. The spouse, after an endearing conference with her beloved, finding it must break off, concludes with this affectionate request for the perfecting and perpetuating of this happiness in the future state. The clusters of grapes that meet us in this wilderness should make us long for the full vintage in Canaan. If a day in his courts be so sweet, what then will an eternity within the veil be! If this be heaven, O that I were there! 5. It is good to conclude our devotions with a joyful expectation of the glory to be revealed, and holy humble breathings towards it. We should not part but with the prospect of meeting again. It is good to conclude every sabbath with thoughts of the everlasting sabbath, which shall have no night at the end of it, nor any week-day to come after it. It is good to conclude every sacrament with thoughts of the everlasting feast, when we shall sit down with Christ at his table in his kingdom, to rise no more, and drink of the wine new there, and to break up every religious assembly in hopes of *the general assembly of the church of the first-born*, when time and days shall be no more: Let the blessed Jesus hasten that blessed day. *Why are his chariot-wheels so long a coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?*