

A Time to Love

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that both Christ's eternal and sacrificial love for humanity and our responsive love to Him define the true Christian life, emphasizing that there is always 'a time to love' in every season of life.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:8, Psalm 22:14-16, Philippians 2:9-11, Isaiah 53:4-6, John 15:13, Romans 5:8

Topics: "Christ's Love", "Christian Devotion", "Faithfulness in Trials"

Description

In 'A Time to Love,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound theme of love as found in Ecclesiastes 3:8, focusing on Christ's eternal and sacrificial love for humanity and the believer's responsive love. Spurgeon vividly recounts Christ's incarnation, suffering, and death as the ultimate acts of love and encourages believers to love Christ steadfastly through all trials and seasons of life. This devotional sermon calls Christians to recognize every moment as an opportunity to deepen their love for Jesus, culminating in eternal fellowship with Him.

Transcript

"A time to love." Ecclesiastes 3:8.

IF you will look at our text, dear Friends, you will see that it is very ominously followed by the words, "and a time to hate." We are changeable creatures and we live in an ever-changing world—and this Chapter gives an accurate summary of how most of our lives are spent! "A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." Ours is a checkered life. We are not long in any one state and we quickly change from one condition to another—which is sometimes better, but sometimes worse.

I am not going, however, to speak about these earthly variations, but about something that is of a far higher order. And I intend, first, to apply the text to Christ's love to us, for He had "a time to love." And then, secondly, to apply it to our love to Him, for we, also, have "a time to love."

I. First, then, concerning CHRIST'S LOVE TO US, for He had "a time to love."

Go back with me in thought, Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, to the council chamber of eternity. God ordained that Adam, the great representative of the human race, would fall in the time of testing and that you and I and all mankind would be ruined by his fall. In His far-seeing vision, He perceived all of us going astray like lost sheep and then arose the necessity for the appointment of a Deliverer to rescue us from going down into the Pit. No angels had been created, then, and even though they would be, not one in all the shining ranks, nor all of them combined, could have saved a single soul! The Savior who would be sufficient to accomplish this colossal task must be Divine. Then was it with Christ "a time to love," and He came forward and entered into an Everlasting Covenant with His Father on His people's behalf. Let us never forget that eternal council chamber where Christ undertook to be our Surety and Substitute and, in due time, to die for us, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

Now let your thoughts fly onward to that period when the fullness of time for the birth of Christ had come. Will Christ leave His throne, His Father's house, the company of the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect? Yes, that He will, for it is with Him now, once again, "a time to love." Stripping Himself of all His bright array and laying aside all His Glory, He comes down to Bethlehem's lowly manger and there I see Him lying in His mother's arms, just as any other infant might have done, though He was so wondrously unlike any other child that was ever born! Having become Incarnate and having come to live here on earth, it was absolutely necessary that a perfect righteousness should be worked out on behalf of His people. But in such a wicked world as this was then, and still is, this could only be accomplished through shame, reproach, rebuke and slander of the most abominable kind! Does someone ask, "Did He endure all that?" Yes, that He did, for it was with Him, "a time to love." He could truly say, "Reproach has broken My heart," yet He willingly bore it for His people's sake. The tongue of slander assailed Him so that even His miracles were attributed to satanic agency. On the Cross, He was to reach the lowest depth of shame and to be "despised and rejected of men"—yet He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem—well knowing all that would befall Him there.

His death upon Calvary was, indeed, "a time to love," for having loved His own, He loved them even unto death! But did the Immortal bow His head to mortality? Did the Eternal hang in agony upon the accursed tree? Yes, that He did, for it was with Him, "a time to love," and many waters could not quench His love, neither could the floods drown it. Come with me, you who truly love Him, and whose hearts leap with joy as you think of His Glory—come with me and see Him in His shame and suffering! There is your Lord and Master, of whom you have often sung—

"Crown Him, crown Him, Crown Him Lord of all"—

yet look at Him now! You will not wonder to see Him so emaciated as you remember the agonies through which He has already passed. There was that dreadful night in Gethsemane when His griefs and woes were so terrible that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death and His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Then there was His betrayal by Judas, the forsaking by all His disciples, the denial by Peter, the mockery of trials before Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, the scourging and the spitting and all the unknown agonies that He had to endure! Ah, Beloved, we talk very calmly about all this, but what must it have been for Christ to suffer thus? Why, a little pain soon lets us see what cowards we are—a little spittle from slanderous tongues drives us almost to despair! We cannot endure much for our Lord's sake, but see how much He endured for our sake! Listen to Him as He applies to Himself the prophetic language of David in the 22nd Psalm—"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; it is melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd and My tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You have brought Me into the dust of death. For dogs have

compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet." Surely, now it is with Him, "a time to love." Our sins are piled upon Him in a tremendous load that would crush anyone else—and that makes even Him to cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This was the love of which Charles Wesley sang—

"Stronger His love than death or Hell,

Its riches are unsearchable—

The first-born sons of light

Desire in vain its depths to see!

They cannot reach the mystery,

The length, and breadth, and height" But has Christ ceased to love us now? Oh, no, Beloved, for every day and every moment is with Him, "a time to love. "Do you remember when you knew Him not, or only knew Him to despise Him? You went to the House of Prayer, but you were godless and careless. You heard the preacher inviting his hearers to acknowledge Jesus as their King, but you said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us!" Perhaps you were among those who cursed His name, profaned His Sabbaths and persecuted His people—yet it was with Him, "a time to love," and His great love was manifested toward you even when you were dead in sins! For Christ to love us when we love Him is gracious on His part, but for Him to love us when we hated Him is most wondrous of all! Strange, indeed, is it that it should have been with Him, "a time to love" when with us it was, "a time to hate."

Do you remember, too, my Brothers and Sisters, when you did kneel in secret before the Lord and your broken heart poured itself out in sighs and groans? When you did cry out from the depths of your soul, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," did not the Lord say to you, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you"? And was it not, then, with Him, "a time to love"? And since then you have sinned against Him again and again, yet He has loved you notwithstanding all! You have had many a time when your spirit was cast down within you, yet you have found that it was with your Lord, "a time to love" you. You have been many a time in the furnace of affliction, yet that, also, has been with your Lord, "a time to love" you! When you were despised by your fellows, when you were slandered and maligned, did Jesus forsake you? Has He ever proved false to you? Has His love toward you ever ceased? Has that fountain ever been dried up? No, Beloved, from the first day when He called us, by His Grace, even until now it has always been with Him, "a time to love." It is so at this moment. You may be slow to embrace Him, but He is not slow to embrace you! You may not be saying, with the Psalmist, "My heart and my flesh cries out for the living God," but He wants to see your face, He longs to hear your voice, for with Him it is now, as it has always been, "a time to love."

You shall also soon fall asleep in Jesus. Your hands shall soon be stretched out motionless and your eyes shall be closed in darkness. But, thank God, your last hour shall be very specially with your dear Lord and Savior, "a time to love" you, and you shall then realize the truth and sweetness of Dr. Watts' lines—

"Jesus can make a dying bed Feel soft as downy pillows are, While on His breast I lean my head, And breathe my life out sweetly there." Then, in due time, shall come the Resurrection and amidst the splendors of that long-looked for day, the great King, stepping down from His Throne, shall meet His Spouse, His Church, and clothing her with His own Glory, shall take her up to sit with Him upon His

Throne and then, indeed, shall it be with Him, "a time to love." Then, in the millennial age, when—

"No strife shall vex Messiah's reign, Or mar those peaceful years To plowshares men shall beat their swords, To pruning-hooks their spears"—

it shall still be with Christ, "a time to love." And in Heaven, itself, when depth and Hell shall have been cast into the Lake of Fire and when all the redeemed shall have been gathered home to their Father's house where there are many mansions, and the Lord's right hand shall have gotten Him the final victory over all His enemies, it shall still be with Him, "a time to love."

II. Now, secondly, we are to apply the text to OUR LOVE TO CHRIST.

We, also, have often proved that it is with us, "a time to love." Our Lord's love to us is the great eternal Fountain from which our love to Him always springs, so let it not be unworthy of the Divine source from which it flows. Wake up all your powers and passions, Beloved, while I try to speak upon this lower, yet truly important theme! If my voice should weary you, let your Beloved's voice charm you while He speaks right into your hearts.

When has it been with you, "a time to love"? Go back to the beginning of your Christian life. Do you remember that blessed day when Jesus first met with you? You can never forget the time when your great load of guilt rolled off your shoulders and you were so relieved that you felt you must dance for joy! Ah, that was, indeed, "a time to love." Young converts, make the best use you can of your earliest consecrated hours—let the love of your espousals be inexpressibly sweet. There will be many other times of love, but none of them will ever have quite the same sweetness as you enjoyed when first you realized that Christ had loved you with an everlasting love and, therefore, with loving kindness had drawn you unto Himself. Oh, what rapturous fellowship my soul had with Him on that never-to-be-forgotten day when—

"I looked to Jesus and I found In Him my star, my sun!"

I could have kissed the blessed hands and feet from which flowed the blood that cleansed me from all my sins! I could have sung, then, from my very soul—

"Through floods and flames, if Jesus leads, I'll follow where He goes! 'Hinder me not, 'shall be my cry, Though earth and Hell oppose."

That was, indeed, in the deepest and best sense, "a time to love."

Since then, it ought always to have been with us, "a time to love" our Lord but, alas, it has not been so, for our hearts have grown cold and lukewarmness has stolen upon us. Yet do we not remember when we had to forsake all for Christ? Some of you, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, can recall the time when things came to this pass—that your own parents and brothers and sisters would have nothing to do with you unless you would have nothing to do with Christ. With others of you, it was your business that must fail if you keep true to Christ. In some instances, it was a very dear friend who threatened to part with you forever if you would not part with Christ. But whatever form your trial took, I feel sure that it was with you, "a time to love" your Lord with even greater intensity than before—that is to say, if you ever loved Him at all. I think it is really "a time to love" the Savior when it costs us something to love Him. And I can bear my testimony that there is never a better "time to love" the Savior than when most everybody seems to be against

you. I can never forget that night in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall when such a terrible calamity happened while I was preaching to an immense congregation. I was blamed by many as though I had caused the catastrophe. For a time, it seemed as though my brain could not recover from the dreadful shock that it received when I realized what had taken place! My spirit had sunk to the very lowest depths of despair, but one day, as I was walking in the garden to which I had been taken for seclusion and quiet, all of a sudden this passage came to my mind—"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father." [See Sermon #101, Volume 2—THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST.] In a moment, the thought came to me that as long as Christ was exalted, it did not matter what became of me! If my King was crowned. If my Captain gained the victory, it did not matter even if He allowed me to be flung upon the dunghill as worthless and permitted my name to be slandered by every tongue and every pen! Then was my soul quieted and my heart found rest and, it was, indeed, to me, "a time to love" my Lord more than ever as I thought of His present exaltation and His future universal triumph!

Beloved, you have sometimes had a sense of sin that has made you thoroughly wretched. But you have gone again to the—

"Fountain filled with blood"—

and you have received renewed tokens of your Lord's favor and that has been to you, "a time to love" Him still more ardently! Have you backslidden, and has your loving Lord knocked at the door of your heart until you have let Him in again? Then that has surely been to you, "a time to love" Him most intensely. Have you had—

"Streams of mercy, never ceasing"? Have you been permitted to prosper in this world? Then, surely, that was "a time to love" your Lord for all His goodness to you. On the other hand, did your riches take to themselves wings and fly away, or were those who were very dear to you, called Home to be with Jesus? Then that, also, was "a time to love" your Lord, for we often love Christ all the more when we lose everyone else and everything else! Rutherford put this thought very sweetly when he was writing to one who had lost first her husband, and then each of her children, one by one. "Your Ladyship must be very dear to the heart of Christ," he wrote, "or He would not try you as He does. He takes such delight in your love that He would have every atom of it for Himself—so He took your husband first, for He said, 'I will have the husband's share of her love.' Then you poured out your love upon your first-born, his father's heir, and Jesus took him, for He said, 'I will have the share of love that she gives to her eldest son.' So it went on until you had only one of your darlings left, your Benjamin, and He said, 'I will have Benjamin's portion,' so He took him, also, away that He might have all your Ladyship's love for Himself. And," added Rutherford, "I often wish that He would think as much of me and try me in some such way as that." So, Beloved, when trial has come to you, I trust that you, also, have proved it to be "a time to love" your Lord more than you have ever done before!

And when your brethren grow cold and the Church as a whole gets lax, when you have to sorrowfully cry, "How sadly the faithful are failing from among men!" then is it "a time to love" your Lord with all the greater fervency because the love of so many is waxing cold! When the mortal and the human prove how frail and fickle they are, then lay hold the more firmly on Him who is Immortal and Divine—and who will,

therefore—never disappoint those who put their trust in Him. And, on the other hand, when you are able to rejoice in real fellowship with your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, then it is also, "a time to love," so gather up all the love of all the saints into one great bundle, put your own into the middle of it and give it all to Christ Jesus your dear Lord and Savior!

I was thinking, this afternoon, while meditating upon this theme, that this is my "time to love." I can never tell how long it may please the Lord to spare me to this people. That is no concern of mine, but I am greatly concerned to work with all my might for my gracious Lord and Master while I may. So long as I am your pastor, I feel a holy anxiety to get out of you, for the glory of God, all that you can render to Him of sacred service. I feel that it is the minister's business not only to be like the vinedresser who cares for the vine in all the various stages of its growth, but he must also be like the treader of grapes who seeks to get every drop of the luscious liquid out of the purple clusters beneath his feet. I long to see the rich wine of your souls' affections flowing out to your Lord to the very last drop—and it would be a most comforting thing to me, even in dying, if I could say, "I have been helped to make my people's hearts warm with Jesus' love,

to loosen their tongues to proclaim to others His immense, unsearchable love, to set their hands busily to work for Christ in many ways and to start their feet running to search out the Lord's stray sheep and bring them back to His fold!" This, then, is my "time to love."

But Brother and Sister in Christ, is it not also your "time to love"? Think what opportunities you have down here of showing your love to your Lord and Savior! Even in Heaven you will not be able to do what you can do on earth in the way of succoring the needy, helping the feeble, comforting the desponding, reclaiming the backsliding and seeking to point sinners to the crucified Savior! The angels can prostrate themselves adoringly before the Throne of God, but they cannot teach the children in our Ragged schools. Redeemed and glorified spirits can join in the everlasting hallelujahs of the skies, but they can no longer climb up creaking staircases in the haunts of poverty and minister to the sick and dying who lie languishing there. They can still praise their Lord, but they cannot preach Him! They can talk to one another of His love, but they cannot make it known to lost and helpless sinners as you and I can. So let this, Beloved, be our "time to love."

That Communion Table, where many of us will presently gather to commemorate our Savior's dying love reminds us that whenever we come to our Lord's Table, it should be with us "a time to love." What love is pictured in those emblems of our blessed Master's broken body and poured-out blood! He knew how prone we would be to forget Him, so He instituted this memorial ordinance on purpose to remind us of Him as often as we should partake of it. The bread and the wine are reminders, not only of Christ's great love to us, but also of His ardent desire that we should love Him. Can I, my Lord, dare partake of those sacred emblems and yet not love You with my whole heart and soul? If the days of persecution were to come back, how many of us would be willing to go to the stake and be burned alive rather than give up our love to Christ? Yet think of all that He endured for us! He gave His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked out His hair—and He hid not His face from shame and spitting! My gracious Master, You have given Your flesh and Your blood to be the spiritual food of my soul—give me the Grace to consecrate my flesh and blood and all the powers of my body, soul, and spirit to You and to Your blessed service! Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, come with me and fall down before the Lord in loving adoration—

"Words are but air, and tongues but clay"—reverent silence seems congenial to such a theme as this—

"Love Divine, all loves excelling,

Joy of Heaven, to earth come down." Blessed Jesus, how can we adequately praise such love as Yours? Oh, for a heart that could be all on fire and for a body that should be like a smoking sacrifice offered up as a whole burnt-offering to You! Well, if we cannot have this while we are still in this imperfect state, we must look forward to another "time to love" our Lord more fervently than we can ever do here below! But, by-and-by, when we reach the blessed land beyond the river, when we shall sit down at the King's own table in Glory, when we shall feast upon such dainties as we have never seen or tasted upon earth, then, indeed, will it be "a time to love" to the highest degree that is possible to the glorified spirits above!

Now I have finished my discourse when I have said how grieved I am that all of you do not experimentally know what I have been talking about. Oh, that you all really knew the love of Christ! Your eyes must be blind, indeed, if you cannot see the beauties of Jesus! Your ears must be deaf if you cannot hear His charming voice! And your hearts as hard as adamant—are you made of such Hell-hardened steel that you will not love my Lord and Master? By those wounds that He endured even for His enemies, by that blood which so freely flowed for those who were then His foes, by those languid eyes so full of pity for sinners, by that loving heart overflowing with compassion for the vilest of the vile, I implore you to tell me—Can you look at Him and not love Him? Can you think of Him as He hung upon Calvary's Cross and not put your soul's trust in Him? Come and see if there is any sorrow that is like unto His sorrow—

"All you that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh,

To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?" Look at Him dying there, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." And if God the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see Him and give you the Grace to trust Him, you will gladly enough yield to Him the love of your hearts! And if you once really love Him, you will gladly be His servant forever! I cannot comprehend how it is that some of us are so cold towards the Lord Jesus Christ. How is it that we can, even for a moment, tolerate that wicked, that diabolical

Laodicean lukewarmness towards Him whose love is like a flaming fire? Come, Holy Spirit, give us coals of juniper! No, give us of Your own Divine sacred fire—

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,

With all Your quickening powers,

Come shed abroad a Savior's love—

And that shall kindle ours." Then shall it indeed be with us "a time to love." God grant that it may be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: SONG OF SOLOMON 4.

This is a chapter which is, perhaps, more adapted for private meditation than for reading in public. Nevertheless, as this is a communion season, and I trust that the most of us are partakers of the life of God, I could not resist reading it this evening. It is a love song, the song of the loves of Jesus. As He sets forth the beauties and charms of His Church, may the same beauties and charms be found in everyone of us through the Grace which He imparts to us by His Spirit! May we, as parts of His mystical body, be fair and lovely in His esteem because He has bestowed upon us so much of His own loveliness! Let us walk so carefully with God that there may be nothing to put even a spot upon our garments, or to defile our

Grace-given comeliness.

Verse 1. Behold, you are fair, My love; behold, you are fair "Twice fair, first, through being washed in My blood and next, through being sanctified by My Spirit!"

1. You have doves' eyes within your locks. Jesus prizes the love of His people which flashes forth from their eyes as they look upon Him. The good works of His people, like the locks of hair which are the beauty and glory of the female form, are the beauty of the Church and of every individual Believer. It is a beautiful thing to have the eyes of faith glistening between the locks of our good works to the praise and glory of God!

1. Your hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gileat. O my Soul, see that you have many such acceptable works of faith and labors of love!

2. Your teeth—Those parts of our spiritual being with which we feed upon Christ, and masticate and assimilate the Word. "Your teeth"—

2. Are like a flock of sheep that are evenly shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. We should seek so to feed upon the Word as to become fruitful by it. If we spiritually feed upon the flesh of Christ, we shall afterwards be the means of bringing forth an abundant harvest of holiness to His praise and honor.

3. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet And well they may be, for what is there for the Believer to talk about but the scarlet of the Savior's blood—that matchless bath in which we are washed whiter than snow? My mouth, be you filled with the praises of the Lord, that my lips may be like a thread of scarlet!

3. And your speech is comely. There is always a comeliness in that conversation which is full of Christ! So, Beloved, let your conversation always be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ. But that cannot be the case unless there is much of Christ in it.

3. Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within your locks. Those parts of us with which we think upon God's Word should always be surrounded by good works. Doctrines in the head, without holiness in the life, are of no service. But when the temples are covered with the locks of righteousness, then are they like a piece of a pomegranate, acceptable both to God and men.

4. Your neck is like the Tower of David built for an armory. And what is this but our faith? Does not the neck join the body to the head—and is not faith that connecting link by which we are united to Christ? Oh, for that faith which is like the Tower of David built for an armory! It is sure to be assaulted—let it, therefore, be firmly founded and fully armed.

4. Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty met. They hung up their bucklers in memory of their triumphs. Read the 11th Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is a record of the victories of faith. The prom-

ises of God are also like these bucklers which are hung up in the armory! Let us be so familiar with them that we shall have them ready for use in every emergency.

5. Your two breasts are like two young roes that are twins which feed among the lilies. The ordinances of God's House are very delightful to Christ and to His people, too. And consequently, that part of our

spiritual being which seeks to feed others and specially to nourish the young Believer, is very precious in Christ's esteem. When He has finished the description of His Church, Christ says—

6. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will get Me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. Our Beloved has gone away from us until the day of His reappearing—until the night of His Church's anxiety is over and the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings! Jesus has gone from earth, but where is He? He has gone to intercede for us before the Throne of His Father! He has gone to where there are mountains of myrrh. Think, Beloved, of the sweet perfume that always arises from His one great Sacrifice for sins! Well may He compare it to a mountain of myrrh and to a hill of frankincense!

7. You are all fair, My love, there is no spot in you. Drink that truth in, Christian. If ever there was a honeycomb full of virgin honey, it is here. Though in yourself you are defiled, yet in the eyes of Jesus, looked upon as covered with His righteousness, "you are all fair." No, more—"there is no spot in you." You are as dear to Him as though you had never sinned! Yes, in His sight you appear without a single fault! He has so cleansed you in His precious blood that "there is no spot in you."

8. Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' den, from the mountains of the leopards. My Heart, leave the world! Leave its sweet places—though Lebanon is full of fragrance—leave it! Leave the world's high places. Though the top of Amana may seem to reach to Heaven, leave even that to have communion with your Lord! "Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." The best spots in the world are for you, O Spouse of Christ, but lions' dens and mountains of leopards! You are always in danger while you consort with worldlings, you are always in peril while you are entangled with the world—so get away from Lebanon, from Amana, from Shenir and Hermon—leave everything for your Lord!

9. You have ravished My heart. I think the Septuagint reads it, "You have unhearted me," as if Christ's people had taken away His heart so that it was all theirs, and not His any longer. "You have ravished My heart."

9. My sister, My spouse, you have ravished My heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck. The eyes of love and the neck of faith with its chain, hold captive the heart of Christ—

"So dear, so very dear to Christ, Dearer I cannot be.

The love wherewith God loves His sons, Such is Christ's love to me!"

Oh, what a miracle of mercy it is that Christ, Himself, should be unhearted by such foul and loathsome creatures as we were! Yet He loved us so that He would have us and, having determined to do so, He put a beauty upon us that is really now worthy of His love! I speak advisedly, for the righteousness of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit have in them something so fair that Christ does not now love that which is unworthy of His love—that righteousness which He has Himself worked in us now rightly claims His affection.

10. How fair is Your love, My sister, My spouse. [See Sermon #282, Volume 5—CHRIST'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE.] Hear that, O Spouse of Christ? Your love is often very cold, very feeble and, even at its best, it is not what you would have it to be, nor what it ought to be. Yet Jesus values it highly and says,

"How fair is your love, My sister, My spouse!"

10. How much better is your love than wine! Yet He knows what the best wine is like, for He is one day to drink it new with us in His Father's Kingdom, yet He says that the love of His people is much better than wine, yes, even than that wine.

10. And the smell of your ointments than all spices! You know that He has the smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia upon His garments when He comes out of the ivory palaces, yet He considers that His people's graces are sweeter than all the spices that ever grew.

11, 12. Your lips, O My spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under your tongue; and the smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain

sealed. [See Sermons #431, Volume 8—A SECRET AND YET NO SECRET and #1957, Volume 33—THE LORD'S OWN VIEW OF HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE.] Oh, that my heart were like that at this moment! Jesus, shut the gates and shut out the world, and every wandering, wayward, sinful thought! Then shut Yourself in my heart and walk in it as in a garden that is walled around into which no intruders dare enter!

13, 14. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. Oh, that this were fully true of us—that all our thoughts, words, and actions, which are like the fruits of the garden, were as full of spices of heavenly fragrance as Jesus here declares that He thinks them to be! Yet, alas, how little we do for Him, though He sets such store by our little that He regards it as much!

15. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Such should the whole Church and each individual Believer be. O my Soul, be not only shut up for Christ, but be, when the time comes, opened to do good to all the world! Oh, that I might be like a well of living waters in my speech at all times! And that you, my beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whenever you are dealing with others, might be a well of living waters to every thirsty soul! Speak of Jesus wherever you go! Talk of Jesus whenever you can! You have been shut up and Christ has been in you—now be opened to give forth to others what He has given you! The Chapter concludes with a delightful prayer. Let us, each one, pray it—

16. Awake, O north wind, and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my

"MY GARDEN"—"HIS GARDEN."] The Church here, you see, desires to

feel two opposite winds. Though it should be the rough north wind of affliction that blows upon her, if it will but make her spices flow, she will be glad. But if it is the soft south wind of blessed and hallowed fellowship with her Lord, she is equally pleased, for what she longs after is that her Lord may take delight in her.

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