

The Twentieth Sermon

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Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was lecturer at Holy Trinity, Cambridge, 1610-1615, preacher at Gray's Inn, London, from 1617, and Master of St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge, from 1626 until his death. He was one of the most significant preachers of the Puritan period.

CANT. VI. 8

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine; he feedeth among the lilies.

These words are a kind of triumphant acclamation upon all the former passages; as it

The church, you see here, though she stood out a while against all Christ's invitation and knocking, yet at length she is brought to yield herself up wholly unto Christ, and to renounce herself, which course God takes with most, yea, in a manner with all his people, ere they go out of this world, to lay all high things low, beat down every high thought and imagination which exalteth itself against him, 2 Cor. x. 5, that they may give themselves and all they have to Christ, Luke xiv. 26, if he call for it. For he that doth not so is not worthy of Christ. If we do not this, at least in preparation of mind, let us not own the name of Christians, lest we own that which shall further increase and aggravate our condemnation, professing religion one way, and yet alienating our minds to our lusts and pleasures of the world another way. To have peculiar love-fits of our own, distinct from Christ, how stands this with 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine'? How stands it with the self-resignation that was spoken of before?

Now this follows upon apprehension of Christ being ours. 'I am my beloved's, because my beloved is mine first.' There are four reasons why Christ must be given to us before we can give ourselves to him by this self-resignation.

1. *Because he is the chief spring of all good affections*, which he must place in us; loving us, ere we can love him, 1 John iv. 10, 19.

2. *Because love descends*. Though it be of a fiery nature, yet in this it is contrary, for love descends, whereas fire ascends. The superior, first loves the inferior. Christ must descend in his love to us, ere we can ascend to him in our affections.

3. *Because our nature is such that we cannot love but where we know ourselves to be loved first*. Therefore God is indulgent to us herein; and that we may love him, he

manifests his love first *to us*.

4. *Because naturally ourselves, being conscious of guilt, are full of fears from thence.* So that if the soul be not persuaded first of Christ's love, it runs away from him, as Adam did from God, and as Peter from Christ, 'Depart from me, for I am but a sinful man,' Luke v.8. So the soul of every man would say, if first it were not persuaded of God's love in Christ, 'Who amongst us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?' Isa. xxxiii. 14. Therefore to prevent that disposition of soul which would rise out of the sense of guilt and unworthiness, God first speaks to us in Christ; at length saying unto our souls, 'I am thy salvation,' whereupon the soul first finding his love, loves him back again, of whom it finds itself so much beloved; so that our love is but a reflection of his, 'I am my beloved's, because my beloved is mine.'

It is with the Spirit of God as with the spirits in the soul and body of a man, there is a marriage betwixt the body and soul. The spirits join both together, being of a middle nature; for they have somewhat spiritual near the soul, and somewhat bodily near the body. Therefore they come between the body and the soul, and are the instruments thereof, whereby it works. So it is with the Spirit of God. The same Spirit that tells the soul that Christ is ours, the same Spirit makes up the match on our part, and gives us up to Christ again.

Let this then be the trial that we are Christ's, by the spiritual echo that our souls make to that report which Christ makes to our souls, whether in promises or in instructions.

Use 1. See hence likewise the nature of faith, for these are the words of faith as well as of love. Faith hath two branches, it doth give as well as take. Faith receives Christ, and says, Christ is mine; and the same faith saith, I am Christ's again. Indeed, our souls are empty; so that the main work of faith is to be an empty hand, *mendica manus* (as Luther calls it); a beggar's hand to receive. But when it hath received it gives back again, both ourselves and all that we can do. The churches of Macedonia 'gave themselves,' and then 'they gave their goods,' 2 Cor. viii. 5. Where faith is, there will be a giving of ourselves and our goods; and, by a proportion, our strength, wits, and all back again. This discovers a great deal of empty false faith in the world; for undoubtedly if it were true faith there would be a yielding back again.

Use 2. And again, these words discover the mutual coherence of justification and sanctification, and the dependence one upon another. 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.' Christ is mine; his righteousness is mine for my justification; I am clothed with Christ as it is, 'The spouse there is clothed with the sun,' Rev. xii. 1, with the beams of Christ. But is that all? No. 'I am my beloved's;' I am Christ's. There is a return of faith in sanctification. The same Spirit that witnesseth Christ is ours, it sanctifies and alters our disposition, that we can say, I am Christ's. It serves to instruct us therefore in the necessary connection of these two, justification and sanctification, against the idle slander of papists, that sinfully traduce that doctrine, as if we were Solifideans, as if we severed justification from sanctification. No. We hold here that whensoever Christ is ours, there is a spirit of sanctification in us, to yield all to Christ,

though this resignation be not presentl perfect.

Use 3. This likewise helps us, by way of direction, to understand the covenant of grace, and the seals of the covenant, what they enforce and comprise; not only what God will do to us, but the duty we are to do to him again, though we do it in his strength. A covenant holds not on one side, but on both. Christ is mine, and I am Christ's again. 'I will be their God,' but they must have grace 'to be my people,' Lev. xxvi. 12; and then the covenant is made up. The covenant of grace is so called, because God is so gracious as to enable us to perform our own part.

And so in the seals of the covenant in baptism. God doth not only bind himself to do thus and thus to us, but binds us also to do back again to him. So in the communion, we promise to lead a new life, renewing our covenant; and therefore we must not think that all is well (when we have received our Maker), though we continue in a scandalous, fruitless course of life. No. There is a promise in the sacrament (the seal of the covenant of grace), to yield up ourselves to God, to return to Christ again with our duty. Then we come as we should do when we come thus disposed. This for direction, 'My beloved is mine, and I am my beloved's.'

Use 4. To proceed to make an use of comfort *to poor, doubting Christians.* 'I am my beloved's,' is the voice of the whole church, that all ranks of Christians, if they be true, may without presumption take up. I have not so much faith, so much love, so much grace, so much patience as another, saith a poor Christian; therefore I am none of Christ's. But we must know that Christ hath in his church of all ranks, and they are all his spouse, one as well as another, there is no exception. There is a little spirit of emulation, and a spice of envy, in Christians that are weaker. If they have not all that great measure of grace which they see in others, they fear they have none at all; as if there were no babes in Christ's school as well as men and grown persons.

Then again, we see here the nature of faith in the whole church. It is the same that is in every particular, and the same in every particular as it is in the whole church. The whole church saith, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.' I appropriate him. There is a spirit of appropriation in the whole, and there is so in each particular. Every Christian may say with Paul, 'I live by faith in the Son of God, that hath loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. ii. 20; and with Thomas, 'My God, and my Lord,' John xx. 28.

The ground hereof is, because they are all one in Christ, and there is one and the same Spirit in the whole church and every particular Christian, as in pipes, though of different sounds, yet there is the same breath in them. So Christians may have different sounds, from the greater or lesser strength of grace that is in the one and in the other, but all comes from the same breath, the same Spirit. The Spirit in the bride saith Come, Rev. xxii. 17, the whole church saith it, and every particular Christian must say it; because, as the body is acted by one spirit, and makes but one natural body, though consisting of many parts weaker and stronger, so should there be a harmony in this mystical body acted by that one Spirit of Christ, who so regards all, as if there were but one, and regards every one so, as he doth not forget the whole. *Sic omnibus attentus ut non*

detentus, &c. Christ so attends to all, that he is not detained from any particular, and he so attends every particular, that he is not restrained from all. There is the same love to all as to one, and to every one, as if there were no other. He so loves each one, that every Christian may say as well as the whole church, Christ is mine, and I am Christ's.

In those things that we call homogeneous, there is the same nature in each quantity as in the whole, as there is the same nature in one drop of water as in the whole ocean, all is water; and the same respect of a spark, and of all the element of fire. So Christ bears the same respect to the church as to every particular, and to every particular as to the church.

Use 5. To come to make an use of direction, *how to come to be able to say this*, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.' For answer hereto, take notice in the first place, from the dependence. Christ must be first ours, before we can give ourselves to him.

(1.) Therefore, we must dwell on the consideration of Christ's love. This must direct and lead our method in this thing. Would we have our hearts to love Christ, to trust in him, and to embrace him, why then think what he is to us. Begin there; nay, and what we are: weak, and in our apprehension, lost. Then go to consider his love, his constant love to his church and children. 'Whom he loves, he loves to the end,' John xiii. 1. We must warm our souls with the consideration of the love of God in him to us, and this will stir up our faith to him back again. For we are more safe in that he is ours, Gal. iv. 9, Philip. iii. 12, than that we give ourselves to him. We are more safe in his comprehending of us, than in our clasping and holding of him. As we say of the mother and the child, both hold, but the safety of the child is that the mother holds him. If Christ once give himself to us, he will make good his own part alway. Our safety is more on his side than on ours. If ever we have felt the love of Christ, we may comfort ourselves with the constancy and perpetuity thereof. Though, perhaps, we find not our affections warmed to him at all times, nor alike, yet the strength of a Christian's comfort lies in this, that first, 'Christ is mine,' and then, in the second place, that 'I am his.' Now, I say, that we may be able to maintain this blessed tradition of giving ourselves to Christ,

(2.) Let us dwell on the consideration of his love to us, and of the necessity that we have of him; how miserable we are without him, poor, beggarly, in bondage to the devil. Therefore we must have him to recover us out of debt, and to enrich us. For Christ's love carries him forth, not only to pay all our debts for us, but to enrich us; and it is a protecting, preserving love, till he brings us to heaven, his own place, where we shall ever be with him. The consideration of these things will warm our hearts, and for this purpose serves the ministry

(3.) We should therefore, in the next place, attend upon the word, for this very end. Wherefore serves the ministry? Among many others, this is one main end—'to lay open the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Therein you have something of Christ unfolded, of his natures, offices, and benefits we have by him, —redemption, and freedom, and a right to all things in him, the excellencies of another world. Therefore attend upon the means of salvation, that we may know what riches we have in him. This will keep our

affections close to Christ, so as to say, 'I am his.'

(4.) And labour we also every day more and more to bring all our love to him. We see in burning-glasses, where the beams of the sun meet in one, how forcible they are, because there is an union of the beams in a little point. Let it be our labour that all the beams of our love may meet in Christ, that he may be as the church saith, our beloved. 'My beloved is mine, and I am my beloved's,' saith she, as if the church had no love out of Christ. And is it love lost? No; but as Christ is the church's beloved, so the church is Christ's love again, as we see in this book oft, 'My love, my dove.' As all streams meet in the great ocean, so let all our loves meet in Christ. We may love other things, and we should do so, but no otherwise than as they convey love to us from Christ, and may be means of drawing up our affections unto Christ. We may love our friends, and we ought to do so, and other blessings of God; but how? No otherwise than as tokens of his love to us. We love a thing that our friends send to us. O, but it is as it doth convey his affection to us. So must we love all things, as they come from God's love to us in Christ.

And, indeed, whatsoever we have is a love-token, even our very afflictions themselves. 'Whom I love, I rebuke and chastise,' Heb. xii. 6.

(5.) Again, that we may inflame our hearts with the love of Christ, as we are exhorted by Jude, 21, let us consider the vanity of all things that entice us from Christ, and labour every day more and more to draw our affections from them, as we are exhorted—'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty,' Ps. xlv. 10. So, if we will have Christ to delight in us, that we may say we are his, let us labour to sequester our affections more and more from all earthly things, that we may not have such hearts, as St James speaketh of, adulterous hearts. 'O ye adulterers and adulteresses! know ye not that the love of the world is enmity with God?' James iv. 4.

Indeed there is reason for this exhortation; for all earthly things, they are all vain and empty things. There is an emptiness in whatsoever is in the world, save Christ. Therefore we should not set our affections too much upon them. A man cannot be wise in loving anything but Christ, and what he loves for Christ. Therefore let us follow that counsel, to draw ourselves from our former company, acquaintance, pleasures, delights, and vanities. We cannot bestow our love and our affections better than upon Christ. It is a happiness that we have such affections, as joy, delight, and love, planted in us by God; and what a happiness is it, that we should have such an excellent object to fill those affections, yea, to transcend and more than satisfy them! Therefore the apostle wisheth that they might know all the dimensions of God's love in Christ. There is a 'height, breadth, length, and depth of the love of God,' Eph. iii. 18.

And let us think of the dimensions, the height, breadth, and depth of our misery out of Christ. The more excellent our natures are, the more miserable they are if not changed; for look what degree of excellency we have, if it be not advanced in Christ, we have so much misery being out of him. Therefore let us labour to see this, as to value our being in him, so to be able, upon good grounds, to say, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is

mine.'

(6.) Again, let us labour to walk in the light of a sanctified knowledge to be attained by the gospel, for as it is, 'the end of all our preaching is to assure Christ to the soul,' 1 John v.18, that we may be able to say without deceiving our own souls, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. All preaching, I say, is for this end. The terror of the law and the discovery of corruption is to drive us out of ourselves to him; and then to provoke us to grow up into him more and more. Therefore saith John, 'All our preaching is that we may have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and they with us,' 1 John i. 7. And what doth he make an evidence of that fellowship? 'walking in the light, as he is light,' or else we are liars. He is bold in plain terms to give us the lie, to say we are Christ's, and have communion with the Father and the Son, when yet we walk in darkness. In sins against conscience, in wilful ignorance, the darkness of an evil life, we have no communion with Christ. Therefore if we will have communion with him, let us walk in the light, and labour to be lightsome in our understandings, to have a great deal of knowledge, and then to walk answerable to that light and revelation that we have. Those that live in sins against conscience, and are friends to the darkness of ignorance, of an evil life, Oh they never think of the fellowship with Christ and with God! These things are mere riddles to them; they have no hope of them, or if any, their hope is in vain. They bar themselves of ever having comfortable communion with Christ here; much less shall they enjoy him hereafter in heaven.

Therefore labour every day more and more to grow rich in knowledge, to get light, and to walk in that light; to which end pray with the holy apostle, 'That you may have the Spirit of revelation,' Eph. i. 17, that excellent Spirit of God, to reveal the things of God, that we may have the light discovered to us.

What a world of comfort hath a Christian that hath light in him and walks in that light, above another man. Whether he live or die, the light brings him into fellowship with the Father of lights. He that hath this light knows his condition and his way, and whither he goeth. When he dieth he knows in what condition he dieth, and upon what grounds. The very light of nature is comfortable, much more that of grace. Therefore labour to grow daily more and more in the knowledge and obedience of the light.

All professors of the gospel are either such as are not Christ's, or such as are his. For such as are not yet, that you may be provoked to draw to fellowship with Christ, do but consider you are as branches cut off, that will wither and die, and be cast into the fire, unless you be grated into the living stock, Christ. You are as naked persons in a storm, not clothed with anything to stand against the storm of God's wrath. Let this force you to get into Christ.

Use 6. And next for encouragement consider, *Christ offereth himself to all in the gospel;* and that is the end of the ministry, to bring Christ and our souls together, to make a spiritual marriage, to lay open his riches and to draw you to him, 1 John i. 9. If you confess your sins, he will forgive them, and you shall have mercy, 'He relieves those that are wearied and heavy laden,' Mat. xi. 28, and bids those come to him that are

thirsty, Isa. lv. 1. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ offers himself in mercy to the worst soul.

Therefore if there be any that have lived in evil courses, in former times, consider that upon repentance all shall be forgotten, and as a mist scattered away and cast into the bottom of the sea. Christ offers himself to you. These are the times, this is the hour of grace. Now the water is stirring for you to enter; do but entertain Christ, and desire that he may be yours to rule you and guide you, and all will be well for the time to come.

Obj. Do not object, I am a loathesome creature, full of rebellions.

Ans. Christ doth not match with you, because you are good, but to make you good. Christ takes you not with any dowry. All that he requires is to confess your beggary and to come with emptiness. He takes us not because we are clean, but because he will purge us. He takes us in our blood when he first takes us, Ezek. xvi. 9. Let none despair either for want of worth or of strength, Eph. v.27. Christ seeth that for strength we are dead, and for worth we are enemies; but he gives us both spiritual strength and worth, takes us near to himself and enricheth us. Let none therefore be discouraged. It is our office, thus to lay open and offer the riches of Christ. If you will not come in, but love your sinful courses more than Christ, then you perish in your blood, and we free our hands, and may free our souls from the guilt thereof. Therefore as you love your own souls, come in at length and stand out no longer.

And for those that have in some measure given themselves up to Christ, and can say, 'He is mine and I am his,' let them go on with comfort, and never be discouraged for the infirmities that hang about them. For one part of Christ's office is to purge his church by his Spirit more and more; not to cast her away for her infirmities, 'but to wash and cleanse it more and more till it be a glorious spouse like himself,' Eph. v.27. For if the husband will, by the bond of nature, bear with the infirmities of the wife, as the weaker vessel, doth not Christ bind himself by that which he accounts us bound? Is there more love and mercy, and pity in us to those that we take near us, than there is in Christ to us? What a most blasphemous thought were this to conceive so! Only let us take heed of being in league with sin; for we cannot give our souls to Christ, and to sinful courses too. Christ will allow of no bigamy or double marriage. Where he hath anything to do, we must have single hearts, resolving, though I fall, yet I purpose to please Christ, and to go on in a good conversation; and if our hearts tell us so, daily infirmities ought not to discourage us.

We have helps enough for these. First, Christ bids us ask forgiveness; and then we have the mercy of Christ to bear with weaker vessels. Then his advocacy. He is now in heaven to plead for us. If we were perfect, we needed not that office, 1 John ii. 2. Let none be discouraged therefore; but let us labour more and more that we may be able to comprehend in some measure the love of Christ, so will all duties come off sweetly and easily; and then we shall be enabled to suffer all things, not only willingly, but cheerfully, and rejoice in them. Love is of the nature of fire, which as it severeth and consumeth all

that is opposite, all dross and dregs, and dissolves coldness, so it quickens and makes active and lively. It hath a kind of constraining force, a sweet violence. As the apostle saith, 'the love of Christ constraineth,' 2 Cor. v.24.

Let a man that loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, be called to part with his life, he will yield it as a sacrifice with comfort. Come what will, all is welcome, when we are inflamed with the love of Christ; and the more we suffer, the more we find his love. For he reserves the manifestation of his love most for times of suffering; and the more we find the manifestation of his love, the more we love him back again, and rejoice in suffering for him that we love so. Whether they be duties of obedience, active or passive, doing or suffering, all comes off with abundance of cheerfulness and ease, where the love of Christ is, that the soul can say, 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.' Nothing in the world is able to make such a soul miserable. It follows.

'He feedeth among the lilies. The church here shews where Christ feeds.

Ans. For answer, he both feeds his church among the lilies, and delights himself to be there. The one follows the other. Especially it is meant of the church. Those that are his, he feeds them among the lilies. How?

Lilies are such kind of flowers as require a great deal of nourishment, and grow best in valleys and fat ground. Therefore when she saith, 'He feeds among the lilies,' the meaning is, he feeds his church and people in fat pastures, as sheep in such grounds as are sweet and fruitful. Such are his holy word and the communion of saints. These are especially the pastures wherein he feeds his church. The holy truths of God are the food of the soul, whereby it is cherished and nourished up to life everlasting. This whole book is a kind of pastoral (to understand the word a little better), a 'song of a beloved' concerning a beloved. Therefore Christ in many places of this book, he takes upon him the term and carriage, as it were, of a loving shepherd, who labours to find out for his sheep the fattest, fruitfulest, best, and sweetest pastures, that they may grow up as calves of the stall, as it is Malachi iv. 2, that they may grow and be well liking.

You have, to give light to this place, a phrase somewhat like this, where he follows the point more at large, Cant. i. 7. The church there prays to Christ, 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon.' Those that are coming up in the church desire to know with whom they may join, and what truths they may embrace. 'Tell me where thou feedest, and where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon:' that is, in the greatest heat and storm of persecution, as at noon-day the sun is hottest. 'For why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of thy companions?' that is, by those that are not true friends, that are false shepherds; why should I be drawn away by them? I desire to feed where thou feedest among thy sheep. Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of those that are emulators to thee? as antichrist is to Christ. Thus the church puts forth to Christ, whereunto Christ replies, verse 8. 'If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flocks, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents 'that is, if thou know not, go thy way forth, get thee out of thyself out of the world, out of thy former

course, put thyself forward, stay not complaining, go on, put thyself to endeavour, go thy way forth. whither? 'In the footsteps of the flocks.' See the steps of Christians in the best times of the church in former times. Tread in the steps of those that lived in the best ages of the church. 'Feed thy kids,' thy Christians, 'beside the shepherds' tents,' the best shepherds. Mark where the apostles and prophets fed their sheep; there feed thou. And mark the footsteps of the flock that have lived in the best times; for of all times since the apostles and prophets, we must follow those virgin best times. All churches are so far true churches, as they have consanguinity with the primitive apostolical and prophetic churches.

Therefore, 'we are now to go out by the footsteps of the flock.' Mark the footsteps of former Christians, Abraham, Moses, and David; and in Christ's time, of John, Peter, and the rest. Blessed saints! walk as they walked, go their way, and 'feed yourselves by the shepherds' tents.' Mark the shepherds where they have their tents! So these words have reference to the prophetic, especially to the evangelical times, whereunto we must conform ourselves; for the latter times are apostate times. After a certain season the church kept not her purity; which the Scriptures foretold directly, that we should not take scandal at it. The church did fall to a kind of admiration of antichrist, and embraced doctrines of devils, 1 Tim. iv. 1. Therefore now we must not follow these companies that lead into by-paths, contrary to the apostolical ways, but see wherein our church agrees with the apostolical churches and truth, and embrace no truth for the food of our souls, but that we find in the gospel. For antichrist feeds his flocks with wind, and with poison, and with empty things. For what hath been the food in popery? Sweet and goodly titles; as if they, poor souls, had the best pastors in the world, whenas they administer to them nothing but that which will be the bane of their souls, full of poison and fraud. This is spoken to unfold that place which gives light to this, spoken of the pastoral care of Christ, 'he feeds his flock among the lilies,' plentifully and sweetly. From hence may be briefly observed, first,

That Christ feeds as well as breeds. And we have need of feeding as well as breeding. Where dost thou feed? that is, build up thy children, and go on with the work began in them. We have need to be fed after we are bred; and Christ (answerable to our exigence and necessity) he feeds as well as breeds; and that word which is the seed to beget us, is that which feeds too, 1 Peter i. 23. What is the seed of the new birth? The word of God, the holy promises, they are the seed, the Spirit mingling with them, whereby a Christian is born, and being born, is cherished and bred. Therefore, 'as new-born babes,' saith the apostle, 'desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,' 1 Peter ii. 1. So that the same thing is both the seed of a Christian, and that which breeds him; the blessed truth and promises of God.

Quest. If you ask, why we must grow up and be fed still?

Ans. 1. Do but ask your own souls, whether there be not a perpetual renewing of corruption, which still breaks out into new guilt every day. Therefore we have need to feed every day anew upon the promises, upon old promises with new affections.

Somewhat breaks out ever and anon which abaseth the soul of a Christian, that makes him go with a sharp appetite to the blessed truths that feed his soul.

Ans. 2. And then again, we need a great deal of strength, which is maintained by feeding. Besides the guilt of the soul, there needs strength for duty, which must be fetched from the blessed word of God, and the comforts thence, whereby we are able to withstand and resist, to stand and do all that we do.

Ans. 3. And then we are set upon by variety of temptations within and without, which require variety of wisdom and strength, all which must be gotten by feeding; and therefore you see a Christian for his subsistence and being, hath need of a feeding, cherishing, and maintaining still, by the sweet and blessed directions and promises out of the word of God.

Therefore you may see what kind of atheistical creatures those are, and how much they are to be regarded, that turn off all with a *compendium* in religion, Tush, if we know that we must love God above all, and our neighbours as ourselves, and that Christ died for all, we know enough, more than we can practise. They think these *compendiums* will serve the turn, as if there were not a necessity of growing still further and further in distinct knowledge. Alas! the soul needs to be fed continually. It will stagger else, and be insufficient to stand against temptation, or to perform duties.

A second general point out of the text is this, *that as Christ feedeth still his flock and people, so he feeds them fully, plentifully, and sweetly among the lilies.* There are saving truths enough. There is an all-sufficiency in the book of God. What need we go out to man's inventions, seeing there is a fulness and all-sufficiency of truth there? Whatsoever is not in that is wind, or poison. In the word is a full kind of feeding. In former times when they had not the Scriptures, and the comforts of them to feed on, what did the poor souls then? and what do those remaining in popery feed on? Upon stones as it were. There was a dream of an holy man in those times, divers hundred years ago, that he saw one having a deal of manchet (that is, 'white bread' - Ed.) to feed on, and yet all the while the poor wretch he fed on stones. What folly and misery is this, when there are delicate things to feed on, to gnaw upon stones! And what is all the school learning almost, (except one or two that had better spirits than the rest) but a gnawing upon stones, barren distinctions, empty things, that had no substance in them? They had the Scriptures, though they were locked up in Latin, an unknown tongue. They had the sweet pastures of Christ to feed in; and yet all this while they fed, as it were, on stones.

This should shew us, likewise, our own blessedness that live in these times, wherein the streams of the gospel run abundantly, sweetly, and pleasantly. There is a fulness among us, even in the spirits of the worst sort. There is a fulness almost to loathing of that heavenly manna: but those souls, who ever were acquainted with the necessity of it, rather find a want than a fulness; and still desire to grow up to a further desire, that as they have plentiful means, so they may have plentiful affections after, and strength by those means. Let us know our own happiness in these times. Is it not a comfort to

know where to feed and to have pastures to go to, without suspicion of poison? that we may feed ourselves with comforts fully without fear of bane, or noisome mingling of *coloquintida* in the pot, which would disrelish all the rest? to know that there are truths that we may feed on safely? This the church in the former place, Cant. i. 6, 7, accounted a great privilege, 'Oh, shew me where thou feedest at noon.' In the greatest heat of persecution, that I may feed among them. So then it is a great privilege to know where to feed, and so to be esteemed, that thereby we may be stirred up to be thankful for our own good, and to improve these privileges to our souls' comfort.

But the second branch that must be touched a little is, *that there is fulness nowhere but in God's house; and that there, and there only, is that which satisfieth the soul with fatness and sweetness.*

Nay, not only the promises, but the very rebukes, of Scripture, are sweet. The rebukes of a friend, they feed the soul. For we have many corruptions which hinder our communion with God, so that a Christian delights to have his corruptions rebuked; for he knows, if he leave them, he shall grow into further communion with Christ, wherein stands his happiness in this world, and the fulness of his happiness in the world to come.

If this be so, let us know then that when we come to religion we lose not the sweetness of our lives, but only translate them to a far more excellent and better condition. Perhaps we fed before upon vain authors, upon (as it were) gravel, vain company; but now we have our delight (and perhaps find more pleasure) in better things. Instead of that which fed our idle fancy (vain treatises and the like), now we have holy truths to delight our souls. Believe it, a Christian never knows what comfort is to purpose till he be downright and sincere in religion. Therefore Austin saith of himself, 'Lord, I have wanted thy sweetness over long. I see all my former life (that I thought had such sweetness in it) was nothing at all but husks, empty things. Now I know where sweetness is, it is in the word and truth.' Therefore let us not misconceive of religion as of a mopish and dull thing, wherein we must lose all comfort. If we give our-selves over to the study thereof, must we so? Must we lose our comfort? Nay, we have no comfort till we be religious indeed. Christ feeds not his among thorns and briars and stinking weeds, but among lilies. Dost thou think he feeds thee among unsavoury, harsh, fretting, galling things? No; 'he feeds among lilies.' Therefore when thou comest to religion, think that thou comest to comfort, to refresh thy soul. Let us make use of this for our soul's comfort, to make us in love more with the ways of Christ.

Now, to seal this further, see what the Scripture saith in some parallel places. 'The Lord is my shepherd;' and what is the use that David presently makes hereof? Why, 'I shall want nothing,' Ps. xxiii. 1. He will feed me plentifully and abundantly. The whole psalm is nothing but a commenting upon that word, 'the Lord is my shepherd.' How doth he perform the duty of a shepherd? 'He makes me to lie down in green pastures, and leads me by the still waters.' It is not only meant of the body, hut of the soul chiefly, 'he restoreth my soul;' that is, when my soul languisheth and is ready to faint, he restores it, and gives me as it were a new soul; he refresheth it. We see say, recreation is the

creating of a thing anew. So he restores my soul; he gives me my soul anew, with fresh comforts. Thus the blessed Shepherd doth, and how? Because 'he feeds among the lilies,' the promises of the gospel. Then he doth not only do good to the body and soul, but he guides all our ways, all our goings out, 'he leads us in the paths of righteousness.' And why? Because I deserve so much at his hands? No; 'for his own name's sake,' because he hath a love to me; because he hath purchased me with his blood, and given his life for his sheep; hath bought me so dear, though there be no worth in me. He goes on, 'Though I walk through all temptations and troubles,' which are as 'the valley of the shadow of death,' that is, where there is nothing but disconsolation and misery; 'yet I will fear none ill; thou, with thy rod and staff, dost comfort me.' If I, as a wandering sheep, venture to go out of the way, thou, out of thy care, being a sweet and loving shepherd, wilt pull me in with thy hook and staff again. He hath not care only to feed us, but to govern us also. What a sweet Shepherd and Saviour have we in covenant, that deals thus with us! And so he proceeds, 'Thou wilt prepare my table in the presence of mine enemies.' And for the time to come he promiseth himself as much, that God, as he hath been a Shepherd for the present, to provide all things necessary for body and soul and guidance, so surely the goodness of the Lord shall follow me all the days of my life; for he is a perpetual Shepherd. He will not leave us till he hath brought us to heaven. Thus we see in this place the sweet care of Christ.

The like place you have— 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young,' Isa. xl. 11. So he leads them into the pastures, and feeds them plentifully and sweetly, not only with sweet things, but with a tender care, which is sweeter. As a shepherd, he takes into his bosom the poor lambs that cannot walk themselves, and the sheep that are heavy with young. He cares for them; 'he gently leads them' that are poor, weak Christians, that struggle and conflict with many temptations and corruptions. Christ hath a tender care of them. He carries them, as it were, in his bosom and in his arms, and leads them gently; for indeed all Christ's sheep are weak. Every one hath somewhat to complain of. Therefore he hath a tender care; he feeds them tenderly and sweetly, or else they might perish.

Another place notable for this purpose, see Ezek. xxxiv. 14, *seq.*, wherein you have the same metaphor from a loving shepherd; and it is but a comment upon the text. Therefore, being parallel places, they may help our memories: 'I will feed them in good pastures upon the high mountains of Israel; there shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture. I will feed my flock, and cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which is lost, and bring back that which was driven away; I will bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which is sick, and destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them with judgment.' Those that are Christ's true sheep have somewhat to complain of. Either they are sick, or broken, or driven away. Somewhat is amiss or other. But Christ's care preventeth all the necessities of his sheep. He hath a fit salve for all their sores. And, to apply this to the business in hand, doth not Christ feed us 'among the lilies?' Doth he not now feed us with his own body and blood in the sacrament? Would you have better food? 'My body is meat indeed, and

my blood is drink indeed,'—that is, it is the only meat, with an emphasis; the only meat and drink that our souls could feed upon. God gave his Son to death, to shed his blood for my sins. What would become of the hunger-bitten, thirsty soul, that is stung with Satan and his temptations, were it not for the blood of Christ to quench our thirst, and the body of Christ given by the Father to death for sin? Were it not that the soul could think upon this, where were the comfort of the soul? All this is represented to us here in the sacrament. We feed on the body and blood of Christ spiritually, and are refreshed thereby, as verily as our bodies are refreshed with the bread and wine. For God doth not feed us with empty symbols and representations, but with things themselves, that the soul which comes prepared by faith is partaker of Christ crucified, and is knit to him, though now in heaven. There is as sure an union and communion between Christ and the Christian soul, as there is between the food and the body, when it is once digested.

Therefore let us come to this blessed, to this sweet food of our souls with hungry appetites and thankful hearts, that God hath given us the best comforts of his word, and fed us with the sweet comforts of the sacraments, as a seal of the word. We should even spend our lives much in thankfulness for this, that he will feed us so sweetly, that thinks nothing is good enough for our food, but his own self, with his own gracious word and truth. Thus we should be very thankful unto God, and now at this time labour to get hungry appetites fit for this blessed food to receive it.

How shall we do that?

1. Think seriously of the former part of thy life, and this week past. For Christ, the food of the soul, relisheth well with the sour herbs of repentance. Let us stir up in our hearts repentance for our sins, and sorrow in the consideration of our own corrupt nature and life; and when we have felt our corruptions and have the sense of our want, then Christ will be sweet to us. The paschal lamb was to be eaten with sour herbs; so Christ our passover must be eaten with repentance.

2. Then withal there must be purging. There are many things which clog the stomach. Come not with worldly, wicked, malicious affections, which puff up the soul, James i. 21; 'but lay aside,' as the apostle wisheth, 'all guile, malice, and superfluity,' 1 Pet. ii. 1. Empty the soul of all sin and prepossessing (that is, 'pre-occupying' - Ed.) thoughts or affections.

3. And then consider the necessity of spiritual strength, that we have need to grow up more and more in Christianity, to be feeding still. We have need of strong faith and strong assurance that Christ is ours, and that we are his. Let us often frequent this ordinance, and come prepared as we should, and we shall find Christ making good his own ordinance, in his own best time; so as we shall be able to say, in truth of heart, experimentally and feelingly with the church, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feedeth among the lilies.'

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