

# Grace and Glory

## Malcolm H. Watts

THE Song of Solomon is called, in its first verse, ‘the song of songs’, which suggests that of all songs, this is the best or most beautiful. The song’s theme is Christ’s love for his people; and as we turn these sacred pages, we discover something of the mystery of spiritual union and communion. Sometimes it is the Lord who speaks. At other times it is the Church. Henry Law says, ‘Happy are they who hear in the Bridegroom’s words the love of Christ addressed to their own souls. Happy are they who can respond, that the words of the Church are the pure experiences of their inmost feelings.’

At the end of the second chapter, it is the Church, the Bride of Christ, who speaks with a heart overflowing with love. ‘My

Beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether’ (Song 2:16,17).

The first of these verses alludes to the believer’s faith and experience. Faith finds expression in the words, ‘My Beloved is mine, and I am his’. Christ, the Beloved, is presented to us in the Gospel as a free gift to sinners of mankind (Jn 3:16; 6:32); and faith, persuaded that Christ is available to all, receives him who alone can save with an everlasting salvation (Jn 1:12; Col 2:6). The believer can say, ‘My Beloved is mine’; and since Christ has given assurance that he will never turn any away (Jn 6:37; cf. Lk 15:2), he can also say, with gratitude and praise, ‘and I am his’ (Jn 10:14; 2 Tim 2:19).

Experience follows faith. Reference is made to it in the words, ‘he feedeth among the lilies’. Earlier in the chapter, the Lord described his Church as ‘the

lily among thorns’ (Song 2:2; cf. Hos 14:5). ‘Lilies’ will therefore represent believers, his pleasant plants, distinguished both by lowliness and by loveliness. What is meant, then, by his feeding among us? The thought here, surely, is that Christ loves to be ‘in the midst’ of his people. He delights in us and finds refreshment as he walks in the garden of his lilies. Indeed, the Lord Jesus ‘feeds’ among us: that is, he holds sweet, close, and full communion with us, making known to us the secrets of his heart and enabling us to rejoice in a welcome and blessed assurance.

Christ is therefore known by faith and in experience. Sometimes, however, it seems as if the Lord is withdrawing from us and we begin to fear that we shall lose the sense of his presence. Our hearts cry out, as in this very scripture, ‘turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether (or, as in the margin, ‘the mountains of division’). Now that is really a prayer - a prayer that the Lord, in his grace, would be pleased to visit us again. Thankfully, he is never far away. He is, in fact, only a prayer away. O that he might ‘turn’ and come swiftly to us like ‘a roe or a young hart’, leaping over whatever separates us from him - ‘the mountains of Bether’!

‘I must say’, says Samuel Rutherford, ‘the saints have a sweet life between them and Christ. There is much sweet solace of love between Him and them, when He feedeth among the lilies and cometh into his garden...’ (Letter 163)

Believers have a strong desire to increase in their experimental knowledge of Christ - ‘until the day break, and the shadows flee away’.

The ‘day’ to which we look forward is the day of

Christ's Second Coming. Soon, Christ will appear as the sun, elevated on high and surrounded by the clouds of heaven. Ineffable brightness will then radiate from his person and there will be visible displays of his majesty and honour.

As morning light streams into this world, men will stir from their sepulchral beds and join the living to behold the amazing sight. Some people, of course, stricken with terror, will want to hide themselves from the splendour of Christ's presence, but others - the chosen, redeemed, and called - will sing for joy, even as the birds sing in a dawn-chorus.

What secrets will then be revealed! One thing is for sure: there will be a clear manifestation of every person's state and a just sentence shall be both pronounced and executed. It is, after all, a time for Judgement.

In a moment of time, Christ will marvellously transform this poor, ruined world. His glorious power will make it appear new, holy, and beautiful in every respect. The splendour of the Lord will spread over its expanse. Beauty will clothe the hills and valleys. And, most wonderfully, Paradise Lost will become Paradise Regained. God has said, there will be a new heaven - and a new earth.

In his light we shall see light. Believers will look upon the face of God. Glorified before that sight, we will reflect the divine holiness and shine with indescribable lustre. And we will then bask in the bright sunshine of his unchanged and unchanging love. Who can begin to imagine what joy and peace will then be known? 'Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore' (Ps 16:11).

Christ's coming will usher in a day like no other in the whole of history. This day will never draw to a close. It will be an everlasting day.

When that day dawns, we shall see just how

quickly 'the shadows flee away'. What are these shadows but our sins, doubts, troubles, pains, sorrows, - and, of course, our fears of death. But this scripture says they will 'flee away'. Listen to the familiar words of the book of Revelation: 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev 21:4).

There will be no more shadows. Nothing ever again will come between Christ and his people. Nothing will be allowed to hide his glory. Nothing will mar our spiritual enjoyment. Nothing will intimate an unwelcome change. And nothing will be able to depress our exultant spirits. 'The shadows flee away'.

In one of his books, Dr. Horatius Bonar writes, 'How soon shall the present night be forgotten in the brightness of the endless day! How quickly shall the curse give place to the blessing, barrenness be exchanged for fruitfulness, and all pollution be swept clean away! It is but "a little while", and all shall be well'.

This is our blessed hope, even the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let believing souls patiently wait for sunrise. However dark and gloomy our lives may be at present, it will not be long before the Lord Jesus will make us glad. 'Until' the dawn of that happy day, we should pray the Lord to abide with us, to comfort and to strengthen us. We need so much to feel his spiritual and loving presence. Therefore we should cleave to him who alone is our Beloved. Then - in just a little while - he will appear in his glory and our faith will vanish into sight. 'He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds' (2 Sam 23:4). 'And there shall be no night there; and they need no

candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light' (Rev 22:5).

In the last century, a Christian poet wrote the following lines:

I am waiting for the dawning  
Of that bright and blessed day  
When the darksome night of sorrow  
Shall have vanished far away.  
When forever with the Saviour  
Far beyond this vale of tears,

I shall swell the song of worship,  
Through the everlasting years.  
I am waiting for the coming  
Of the Lord who died for me  
O! His words have thrilled my spirit  
I will come again for thee.  
I can almost hear his footfall  
On the threshold of the door;  
And my heart, my heart is longing  
To be with Him evermore.