

What is Your Beloved More Than Another Beloved?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Please open your Bibles to the Song of Solomon. Right before the prophet Isaiah. Chapter 5. Lord, please help as we handle the Word of God. Do we not read that it's like a hammer? The Word of God. Do we not read that it is living? There's activity in this Word. There's power to be unleashed. It's living. It's abiding. It's active. It's cleansing. It's sanctifying. But oh, Lord, if You make it to not be a dead letter - we know that the words on the pages of our Bibles are just ink unless You allow the thoughts captured in these sentences and these paragraphs to enter through our eyeballs, through our ears into our minds and to process them to where our faith clings and lays hold, adheres. Lord, give us ears to hear at this time. I pray in Christ's name.

Song of Solomon. Look there at chapter 5 and verse 9. You'll notice if you have the ESV - and I know that depending on the Bible that you have is going to depend on whether this is actually identified to you or not, but in the ESV, you'll notice that verse 9 has that caption above it: "Others." The primary individuals that we find in the Song of Solomon are Solomon and his love. The Shulammitte. But right here, "others" interject. In 5:8, you'll notice from v. 2 to 8 - again, the ESV, it says "she." The bride. And in v. 8, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem..." So we see who's being addressed. And that's who answers in v. 9. It's the others. It's the daughters of Jerusalem. "If you find my Beloved, tell Him I am sick with love." And then they come back here: "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your Beloved more than another beloved?"

Now, lest we forget where we're at, I would remind you that we have come to the Song of Solomon in the midst of a series in Ephesians. Ephesians 3 - now you don't need to turn there, but listen to this. The words that we were dealing with are these: Paul praying for the Ephesians. That according to the riches of God's glory He might grant the Ephesians to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in their inner man that they being rooted and grounded in love; they might have this ability to comprehend the dimensions - what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; to know this love of Christ that passes knowledge.

And what I find interesting is this: I have dug up Hudson Taylor's little book on the Song of Solomon. I've pulled off my shelf Richard Sibbes, the Puritan, "The Love of Christ," that deals with mainly chapter 5. I have dug up John Gill, the old Particular Baptist - the work that he did on the Song of Solomon. Actually, when I was out in Portland, a brother there brought me a book by James Kennedy DD - this is not D. James Kennedy, this is somebody that lived back in the 19th century. I have looked at various things concerning the Song of Solomon and you know what's interesting to me? Every book, every sermon, every commentary that I have referred to - many of them, most of them, or all of them that deal with the Song of Solomon, they reference these verses in Ephesians 3. Why would they do that? See, that's what led me there. And it wasn't so much that I was reading all these things that make that connection. It was that I felt resonating in me that if we want to capture something of the dimensions of the love of Christ, I

honestly couldn't think of a better place to go in Scripture than the Song of Solomon. And what I'm finding is these preachers that have gone before me - they made the same connection over and over and over again. They made that connection.

Two Main Characters: Solomon and the Shulammitte

So let's think about our two main characters. Solomon. That's the first one. You can see that if you go to chapter 3:11. "Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon." As I've told you before, "Solomon" shows up - that word - shows up 7 times in the book of the Song of Solomon which is significant. The number 7 is a significant one. The other main character is the Shulammitte, and you see that in Song of Solomon 6:13. You can look there. "Return, return, O Shulammitte. Return, return, that we may look upon you. Why should you look upon the Shulammitte?" Now, let's think about that a second. Solomon is the idea of peace. This Solomon is the peace-giver. What is Shulammitte? Now you might say Shulammitte - isn't that somebody from Shulam? That's what that sounds like. It describes a female inhabitant of a place called Shulam. You know what's interesting? Shulam is basically "Salem." Do you know what Salem means? It's basically "Shalom," which is basically "Solomon." What Shulammitte is is simply the feminine of Solomon. That's the issue. Melchizedek was called "the king of Salem." And most assume that that is Jerusalem. What we have is a picture of somebody who is a citizen of Salem or of Jerusalem. And again, perfectly describes us. We are fellow citizens with the saints. We are the true Jerusalem. Jerusalem comes down in the book of Revelation. This new Jerusalem. A bride prepared for Christ. The word "Solomon" - peace giver. He's the prince of peace. She is the daughter of peace. The idea is it's the feminine - she's peace-laden. She's peace-crowned.

I just talked to Craig's boss on Friday. One thing he kept saying to me is I envy Craig's peace. We are a peace-laden; a peace-crowned - if there's anything that's true about the children of God, it is that Christ comes and He whispers peace. Peace. We are a people no longer at war with God. And even on your worst day, you're not at war with God anymore. There is peace between He and you.

Now, I want you to think about this. If all you see here in the Song of Solomon is the literal King Solomon; if you don't see Christ in this and you see the Shulammitte is simply one of his thousand wives or concubines, you've got a problem. Here's one of the problems that I see that you have. Notice Song of Solomon 5:16. He is altogether - altogether desirable. Look back a little ways at Song of Solomon 5:9. This is where we started. "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" Well, you know what? That's easy if we're talking about King Solomon. Diego brought up David. Think about the question. "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" Well, if all we're talking about here is Solomon, I would say Solomon is no more than his father David. In fact, I would say David was a much greater man than Solomon. Would you not agree?

I mean listen, since I've been a Christian more debate has come up over the salvation of three men in the Scripture more than any others. Adam, King Saul, and King Solomon - as to whether they were genuinely saved or not. Now maybe you've got your theories on those, but all I'm saying is King Solomon falls in the ranks of men that often the question gets raised: was he even saved? If we want to go around saying that King Solomon was altogether desirable and who is comparable to that beloved, then we run into some issues.

Have you ever noticed this? That those who do not see Christ and the church in this Song - this Song of all songs - have you ever noticed they never preach on this book? They don't go there. Even though it's holy Scripture, they don't preach from it. Isn't all Scripture profitable for the man of God? Well, you would think that they would go there and preach then, but they don't preach on it. Why? Because who wants to spend sermon time on trying to proclaim Solomon as being altogether desirable and more than all other beloved's? Nobody wants to do that! Because you feel kind of foolish doing it.

Over the years, questions come up about whether Solomon even came to the end of his life. You know, even his wives - he multiplied wives and they led him away into all manner of idolatry. Now look, I believe he was Jedidiah. He was loved of the Lord. I believe that what you have is a man who drifted away and God brought him back. I very much believe he was saved, but like I say, who wants to preach on a book that presents us with the question: Why is our Beloved more than all other beloveds if the beloved being referred to is Solomon? But the reality is if it's Christ, then this book explodes with all manner of light and love and power and beauty and glory. And it does! Think about it. Think about if I was up here trying to convince you that Solomon is altogether lovely. I mean, it's not going to inspire much in us because you're going to be thinking all the time: yeah, but this guy, I mean, he was an idolater. He did what God told him not to do.

Solomon or Christ?

The question of the hour is this: We're talking about Christ here. Christ is the true Solomon. And if we're talking about Christ, then the question comes up: What is your Beloved more than another beloved? That is a worthy matter of contemplation. Just thinking... what a profitable thing to consume your mind with. What is Christ more than all other beloved's? What is He more than all others? And we can answer. What is our Beloved more than all other beloved's? And I would just say this: Has anyone ever loved us like He has loved us? That's the question. And where I would have you take your eyes is just look at Song of Solomon 4. This is really what I want to spend some time with. What is our Beloved more than all other beloveds? And the thing is, I'm going to take you to some verses that actually describe us. And that might seem odd. I mean, what's our Beloved more than others? Well, why would we look at the bride? But I just want you to think with me. When you look at the bride here, what we're seeing is the love of Christ expressed to us just in what He's making us into. Feel this. I love the imagery. I parked right here for this whole message. The idea of a garden.

Many of you know I have a garden. You know, Kevin Williams. We stayed in a room on the back side of his house and there's a big window there and you look out and his backyard goes straight out and then there's a fence across there. And then across is a house that his house backs up to that's over on the other street. They have a backyard. Their backyard is full of trees and plants. In fact, it's become so overgrown the people there don't go out there. And they actually told Kevin that he could buy it if he wanted to. It's like this paradise garden. And I thought how can we help Kevin get this? I mean, what a place if he just put a door right there and the whole thing is walled around and a place where you go into and you just disappear in there because it's all full of trees and plants and bushes... it's just a paradise, at least in my

estimation. So when I think of gardens - especially gardens like that; especially gardens like in Manchester, not where you go out and the sun sizzles you. But this idea of a garden.

A Garden Locked

Look at Solomon's Song here, chapter 4:12. This is Christ speaking to His people. "A garden locked is My sister, My bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, and all trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes with all choice spices. A garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon."

And I would just ask you again, what is our Beloved more than another beloved? Do you realize how much He is loving you? Do you realize what He's doing to you? Do you realize this is not a fictitious description here? This is actual. This is from Christ's perspective. This is what He sees. This is how He views us. We need that to sink in: A garden.

What is a garden? I put a garden in my backyard. What did I do? I went into that backyard and I partitioned a part of my yard off. It's a piece of my yard that I separated. That's the idea. It's a piece of ground that's distinguished. It's set aside. It's separated. And so we are. We are a people that have been specifically hand-chosen by God and set apart. Electing, distinguishing grace has set us aside.

You think about a garden. This garden - there are such things come out of this garden as are impossible to come out of any of our gardens. But just think: myrrh, aloes, choice spices, trees of frankincense, calamus, cinnamon, nard, saffron. He goes on and on about this. Such flowers and herbs and plants. And have you ever noticed this? They don't grow naturally by themselves. Any of you had a garden spring up in your backyard? It just happened to happen? You know, you forgot to mow a part of the yard and it just turned into a garden? Anybody have that happen? Have you ever noticed that doesn't happen? Have you ever noticed flowers don't grow up naturally by themselves?

Listen, look at Song of Solomon 5:1. You know what captures me in this verse is the number of times He says, "My." Look at this. "I came to My garden." Who's the garden? It's this woman. It's the bride. It's His sister. I gathered My myrrh, My spice, My honeycomb, My honey. I drank My wine and My milk. That's what I'm saying - it's impossible for you to get out of your garden what He gets out of His garden. I never got wine out of my garden. I never got milk out of my garden. I never got honey out of my garden. Now, I guess some bees could be in there and I could throw a cow in there and I could raise grapes. But He gets such things out of His. Mine! You notice how He says Mine. It's His garden. My garden. How does Christ find such things in a garden? Myrrh, honey, wine, milk. What a garden it must be to have those kind of things! But I guarantee you this, our hearts, our selves, what we are naturally - you know what springs up in us naturally. Even as Christians, give yourself to the flesh. What did Paul have to tell the Galatians when they gave themselves to try to be perfected by the flesh? He had to tell them, "don't bite, don't devour." Why? Because the flesh breeds corruption in sin. Naturally, that's what comes forth from our hearts. Only weeds grow by themselves. If I just let my garden go - I was gone for two weeks. I go out there and look at it. It shriveled and there's weeds. That's what happens. To keep a garden, it requires help.

If Christ finds all such things in His garden, you know what we have to do? This is where His love comes in. We have to stand back and say: what have You done, Lord? What have You done that those weeds aren't there anymore, but there's milk, there's wine, there's honey, there's honeycomb, there's all manner of frankincense?

Listen, you know what Scripture says? Christ loved the church and He gave Himself for her that she might be sanctified. Isn't that what Scripture says? That by the washing of the water of the Word He might cleanse her. And the thing is it's for the sake of making the church a splendor to Himself. Without spot. Without blemish. Without wrinkle. Holy. Isn't that what Scripture says? Splendor. That's what we have here. We have Christ tending His garden. It takes a massive amount of labor and care, weeding, watering, fertilizing, pest control, pruning, thinning. All this and much more Christ does to His church. He watches over us night and day. Again, what I'm wanting you to recognize is for starters, you have to realize this about yourself. I am such a garden to Christ. And He's not just making this up. He actually finds such spices and fruit and milk and wine in His garden which is me. And He's the one responsible for this.

Brothers and sisters, we don't tend to view ourselves this way. You know what happens? We tend to get engaged in life. Life. Life happens. Trials happen. We get distracted. There's difficulties. We get weary. We get worn. There's challenges of life. There's monotony of life. We forget just what it is that His love is doing for us; what He's making us into. This beauty He finds in her is beauty that He brings forth by washing of the water of the Word, but by trials. Have you ever read in Scripture the sons of Levi - we are the priesthood. He purifies them. They're put in the fire.

The fruit. Think about the fruit. Flowers. The beauty. What is this? We read in the New Testament about fruit. The fruit of the Spirit. Love. We talked about peace. There's joy. And there's gentleness and there's goodness. Do you recognize what's happening? He's doing this that He might present the church to Himself in splendor. Like a garden. But you know what? We doubt it. We tend to doubt it. Why? We can tend to feel dirty. Or we feel unworthy. Yet, there's Christ at work. Think about this. A trial comes into your life. And you recognize you don't have the strength. This is one of the such good things about trials. They show us we're weak. We don't have strength.

So what happens? We become more dependent on Him, more trusting of Him. Our pride is broken. Do you know what that is? Your pride gets broken. It's replaced by humility. That's like a bush of roses over there. You ever go walk by a bush of roses when they're all in bloom? I mean, the aroma... That's what He's likening this to. Your self-sufficiency gets broken and you're dependent. As Diego was talking about, you pray. You pray. Not hypocritically; not to be seen by men. You pray because you want God and you need God. And that's like this shrub - I'm growing goji berries and they are red. I pick them and throw them in the smoothie. It's like that. It's like you look in this garden and the trees - my trees in my yard, sometimes the boughs bend over so far they're so heavy-laden with peaches that they break. I just clipped one off yesterday. It was broken because of the weight.

He comes into His garden. These trials, these things that we fear, these things that we dread, these things that we don't like in our life. What's happening? The outer man wasting away, but He's doing such things through the washing of the water of the Word. This is why getting in the Word every single day - not just five minutes - How fast can I get through it? Check

mark! No, it's meditating on it and it's washing. Sanctify them with Thy Word. Thy Word is truth. And it's washing. It's cleansing. And it's like the vine heavy with grapes. It's like herbs are being talked about. I've got a rosemary plant in my garden. I just threw a seed in - it was just a little seedling. It was just this little thing and now it's grown into this monstrous thing. I'm going to have to hack it back. But it's these herbs and these spices and these fruits and the frankincense and the trees. It's like every one of our lives is like that. It's like He's working such things that sometimes it's hard.

Has He not promised to cleanse us of every one of our idols? And He pulls those out. And to cleanse us from the idol means that our affections to other things are shifted towards Him more and more. And that is just this fruit. And our love for one another is increased. And it's just like apples heavy, hanging on the tree. That's what He likens all of this to. The new man - true righteousness and holiness. And all of this is like vegetables and fruit. And I don't know, there must be a cow. How is He getting milk? I guess you could get almond milk maybe. Isn't that a strange thing to bring out of the garden? And yet, it's there. It's like the riches.

This is us! And this is what He's doing to us. We don't feel it. We feel like: ah, I go out in this world and I feel like I'm trying to walk upright and I'm trying to be what I should be. But such things, such things Christ is doing in us. And He finds us garden-esque. I mean, that's what this is all about. Garden. Do you look at yourself like that, believer? You find meekness. You find love. You find in Scripture it says I shouldn't just give myself to my own things; I ought to give myself to the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ. You find in Scripture all thanksgiving. Have you ever read how often the evil - those in Romans 1 - they didn't give God thanks. Thankfulness. What fruit of the lips! Do you recognize when you're thankful, when you're loving others, living for others, depending on the Lord, going to the Lord often in prayer, just eating His Word, finding Christ, studying His person, seeking to imitate Him, that meekness is in your life, that humility is in your life, that gentleness is in your life, even a sternness or a boldness - even cleansing the temple kind of boldness; when you stand for the name of the Lord, you stand for Christ. You proclaim the Gospel in the midst of this darkness. That is like a garden that is just like that behind Kevin's house. It's just beautiful.

And brethren, this really happens to us. We don't often feel like it's happening. Often, the more like Christ we become, the more remaining defilements and failures and flaws and rough edges - the reality is the more they haunt us. The more we feel them a lot of times and the more it stinks in our nostrils. The more there's a sting and we sigh and we groan. The more unworthy and dirty and unbeautiful we feel. But really, the truth is we are being beautified. This is what Christ is doing. Splendor. Don't you love that word? You may not feel that, because like I say the old man is wasting away. You go look in the mirror and it's like, splendor? My wife was just telling me yesterday how to comb my hair so that the baldness can't be seen. You know, I was talking to Charles Leiter one day and we were both saying we both imagine ourselves to still be 25 years old. And he said my dad was the same way. And Papa, I hear Papa talk. He thinks he's 25. But you go look in the mirror and it's almost like sometimes - does this ever happen to anybody? You're like who are you? I don't even recognize you anymore. But that's what's happening on the outside, but on the inside, we are being loved to perfection. Christ is loving us beautiful. He's loving us perfect. He's loving the blemishes out of us. What is our Beloved more than other beloveds? Gardens. Gardens are places that people delight to walk in. I do.

And notice, Song of Solomon 6:2. This is the church. She says, "My Beloved (Christ) has gone down to His garden, to the beds of spices to graze." Don't you like that? You go into a garden to graze. "To gather lilies..." Now the thing is, usually a garden is comparatively a small space. And that's the way it is with the church. In comparison to the vast wilderness and wasteland out there. We're but a small flock. We're a small place. Do you realize what Christ is doing for you? He has chosen you out of this world to be such a garden. Where is He at? He goes down to His garden to graze. To gather lilies. What is it in your life that is lily? What is it in your life that is for Him to graze? That's what He's doing in our lives. Notice this. Look at 4:12. "A garden locked is My sister, My bride." His love has not only made us a garden - His love has not only made us into a garden, but you want to notice those words: Locked. Locked.

You know my children when they were young, they would listen to an audio series, an audio story called "The Secret Garden." Probably some of your children have listened to that. It was a garden that was walled in. And it had a door and I think the door was hidden behind some ivy that had grown. And a key was found. Do you recognize what this is saying? When you have a garden that's locked, that means it's got a wall. It doesn't mean there's just a door there with a keyhole in it and the rest is wide open all around. It's the idea that this thing is walled in. It's walled. It's protected. And it's got a door with a keyhole. And that door is locked. That door is shut. What's that? What is that? Locked. You know what that means? What a thing for Him to say: you are a garden locked. That means you're for Him only. No one else gets in. No one else has a key. We're for Him. We're reserved for Him. Locked. No one else gets in. It's His garden. He has the key. And I'll tell you what this ought to do - this is what He's speaking to you: You are a garden locked. Don't give yourself to anyone else. Don't share yourself with the world or idols. Give yourselves entirely to Him. Entirely to Him. To be a garden locked means you're walled in. What's that? It means we're protected. We're protected by God's power. Have you ever read there in Zechariah? "I will be a wall of fire to her."

God protects. You know what jumped out at me? I was just recently reading John 17. Christ said this - the high priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus praying to His Father about the 11 disciples. He says this, "I have guarded them." Those words jumped out at me. I have guarded them. You know what? The church may seem weak. In the eyes of the world, we're despised. We may seem like we're open to all manner of attack - doctrine, enemies, false brethren, anti-Christ's who were among us and they went out from us. There's all sorts of things - false teachers, false prophets, false apostles, false christ's, the devil himself. But Christian, never forget this. We have an invisible hedge around us. You may not see it, but we are walled. We are protected. A wall of fire. I have guarded them. You better believe there are such walls around us right now. We read in Hebrews 1 the angels are ministering spirits. But you know, there are times in Scripture when God Himself shows up and you're not shown any mediating activity by angels. God shows up. He comes. He's there. He protects. (coughing) It was said of Canaan back in Deuteronomy - and I take Canaan as a type of the church, a shadow of the church. But it was said of Canaan, you know, God was bringing His people into this land. He said, "It's a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." That's what the church is. His eyes are on us. All the time.

And I brought up that story, "The Secret Garden," because I think of the secrecy of it. You know, as I think of that area out behind Kevin Williams' house, you go in there and you just disappear. It's secret. It's a private place. The wall around it keeps all the eyes out. This is being described of us. We're a garden that's walled in. We're a garden that's secret. A garden that's locked. That's what locked means. It's secret. We're like this garden that's walled in, closely locked, protected, and inside all manner of flowers with their fragrance, and trees heavy-laden with fruit. Secret. We're not known to the world.

Just thinking about that, the text in 1 John occurred to me. I preached on that several years back and that text that says to us the reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. But what I'm pulling on right there is this: The world doesn't know us. That's what John recognized. We're hid. The world doesn't know what's going on. Not until this coming day of the resurrection of the just. Do you read about that in Romans 8? It says the sons of God will be revealed. The world doesn't know. They don't know! These people out here - they don't know. Wow, there's people who the living God has taken out from among their ranks and made into these vastly fruitful gardens. They don't know that. They don't know that we're the elect. They don't know that we're the chosen ones. They don't know that God is doing such things in us and beautifying us this way. They don't know what true Christianity is all about. They don't recognize it. It's not known. We're not known. And they don't know us because they don't know Him. The Christ we know about, they don't know about. They know the name Christ, but in their minds, He's altogether different than what He's portrayed in Scripture and the way we know Him. Hidden. The secrecy and hiddenness of it all.

Now look at this. Song of Solomon 4:16. "Let my Beloved come to His garden and eat its choicest fruit." Listen. Listen. This is the church. "Let my Beloved come to His garden." She is saying let Him come to me. You know, from the very beginning of this little diversion, the thing I've desired as much as anything is that according to the riches of God's glory - like I talked about in the past - that God would put a hunger and ache in our hearts for this. Recognize what's happening! See, hear, feel it. The desire of her heart is: Christ, come to Your garden. Come! Let my Beloved come to His garden. Let Him eat. That's the ache. That's what I've wanted to stir up in your hearts. That is the kind of garden. And what you have is what He is doing in her, what He's making her, the kind of garden that we are. We're a garden locked. But we're a garden from which Christ can come and He can gather myrrh and there's aloes and there's milk and there's wine and there's frankincense and all manner of these spices and these fruits.

Think about this. The imagery doesn't end here. Notice 4:12. "A garden locked is My sister, My bride..." but then He goes even further. "A spring locked, a fountain sealed." My grandmother up in Decatur, Michigan when I was growing up as a kid, we went way back - she had 80 acres. If we went way back, there was a place in the woods where the spring bubbled up out of the ground. And there was a cup hanging on the tree. I guess rumor had it my great-grandfather put that thing there. And he would use it to drink from that spring. The water tasted wonderful. When you think of a spring - spring water. Typically, if somebody bottles water, somewhere on there - if you go to the grocery store and look at the water on their shelves, somewhere on the packaging it says "spring water." Why? Because that conjures in the mind something. Purity. Refreshing.

But then He doesn't stop at spring. Then you go to a fountain. What do you think of with a fountain? Not so much purity, but what? Maybe just the amount of water. A lot of water. The idea that this thing is gushing. Christ's garden is well-watered. That's one of the things that we could definitely say about that. There's no danger that the herbs and flowers and plants and fruit are going to wither or perish. What does the first psalm say? It says that we're like trees planted by the streams of water that yield the fruit in its season. What imagery! And the thing about it is, again, the natural man knows nothing of these things. He's a stranger to what's really happening in the world. The atheist. I think about the atheist. There's all these people that want to continue to sell us on evolution. Atheist. A-atheist. They're against the doctrine of God. Agnostics. Against the idea that it's possible to know God.

But the reality is - the reality is that we know something about Christ walking in His garden. And this is the cry, this is the cry of the church here. Let Him come walk. Let my Beloved come to His garden. And the truth is we know He's there and we know what it is to have Him walk in the garden. And we are that garden. And the truth is it's real and we know it. This is true Christianity. This is no dead religion. It's real. We're walled. We're locked. We're safe. We're secure. The grace of God has shut us in. We're protected. Christ can say it of us: I have guarded them. No one can ever get in. We're hid with Christ in God in this.

And you know what? The imagery here gets dangerous actually. Let me just tell you this. That the same author, when he wrote the Proverbs, he said this: he's wanting to instill in young men purity, being devoted to a single wife, not giving yourself to the forbidden woman. He says "drink water from your own cistern." He doesn't really mean water. He means confine your intimacy to your wife. "Should your springs be scattered abroad? Streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth." And he goes on. But you see, the idea here of springs and fountains.

You know what? We are locked when it comes to being a spring and a fountain in this sense. We're virgins. That's what Paul says to the Corinthians. We are virgins reserved for Him. We're a spring locked, a fountain sealed. Brethren, our purity and our chasteness is for Him. Our devotion to Him. Our spotlessness is for Him. When He talks about making us into this splendid thing, it's as His bride. He's beautifying us not for others, but to present us to Himself in splendor, in beauty. She's Christ's garden. And none but His. She is Christ's spring, Christ's fountain. None have a right to her but Him. She is sister and bride to Him alone. What I'm getting at is this, we dare not share ourselves with other lovers. You, Christian, are a locked garden. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. One lover. You are locked. You are His. You are private. You are secret. You are for Him. Brothers and sisters, this is the heart of Christianity. It is having Christ come to His garden. This is the reality. This is what true Christianity is all about. It's to have Him. It's to know God and His Christ. It's this: you are reserved for Him. Listen, if your Christianity is mechanical; if it's simply duty, if it's simply the checklist, if it's simply that which you don't like to do but you know you've got to do it because you're trying to miss hell, then it's not this. If it's not this, it's not the real thing. It's not the true Christianity.

And look what He does. Look what He does in 4:16. I want you to hear the voice of Christ. Comprehend the love of Christ. Because as His garden, this is what He's saying: "Awake..." Christ speaking. "Awake, O north wind, come, O south wind, blow upon..." again, "My

garden." This is Mine. He's calling to the winds to come and blow upon His garden. So as to do what to it? Make it even more fruitful. "Let its spices flow." Christ calls forth the wind. I love this imagery. Almost always when I think of the Spirit, when I think of revival, don't we talk about the winds of revival?

When I think about revival, I think about wind. I often imagine like a 17th, 18th, 19th century ship with those big masts. We just saw the U.S.S. Constitution when we were in Boston. This great big war ship, but it's got all these main masts on it and multitude of sails. That's what I think of: a ship. We're like a ship with all these sails and the wind blows and it sends us mightily through the water, rushing. That's how I view it.

The Scriptures capture this idea of the Spirit of God being like the wind. Can you think of where? Where do you get that idea of wind in Scripture? John 3 would be one. "Like the wind that blows where it wishes, you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." But can you think of another time where the Spirit is associated with wind? Yeah, the day of Pentecost. A sound like a mighty, rushing wind. These winds. Christ speaks to the winds. And they're at His service. Come and do My garden good. I see this as the Spirit of God.

Now you say, yeah, but those winds are contrary to each other. One's a north wind. One's a south wind. I say that's just the Spirit's operations coming at us from different directions. Now, depending on where you live, like up in Michigan if you thought about a north wind, you think brrr... Here in Texas, the idea of a north wind, or a cool front - you know when they first start coming in late September, that's a happy thing. It depends on where you live. Obviously, what part of the hemisphere, (incomplete thought). But we get the idea. Some winds - they bring rain. Some winds are destructive. Some bring bitter cold. Some bring pleasant spring-like conditions. Some winds are very favorable. And some winds are bitter. This is the idea. I mean, sometimes God blows upon us with comforts. They're joyful times. I mean, we should rejoice in the Lord always, but the truth is there are some circumstances in life that are just happy times. And there are situations that are bitter trials. And the idea is this, these winds - however you take them, it's Christ using different means to perfect His garden, even though they may seem contrary, blows upon us with the warm winds, blows upon us with refreshing winds. Sometimes, blows upon us with winds that seem to be damaging, but you know, they never really damage us. They damage our pride. They damage our false securities. They damage our false hopes. But they're never really damaging to us. Because all things work together for our good if we're truly loving God. And He brings these winds.

It's key to emphasize these difficulties. You have difficulties. Some of you, I know, family difficulties, difficulties with lost children, financial difficulties, health issue difficulties. You get these things. They're struggles. They're trials. Marriage situations. You know what that is? That may be like the north wind. It blows. It hurts. It's uncomfortable. We don't like it. But if we have eyes to see, it's like through these things, He's just spreading the seeds. You can imagine, He spreads the seeds and up grows these beautiful trees in the garden. And He spreads the seeds, and up grows just heavy- laden with fruit, bushes; and He spreads these seeds and plants and herbs and all manner of flowers and the bees must be in there because there's honey and honeycombs. This is what He's doing. We look at it and we get so encased in our surroundings and what we see. But we live by faith, not by sight. But sometimes we're such creatures of sight. Life is difficult. What I'm wanting you to do is just step back in this message today and just

comprehend. If you're a child of God, Jesus Christ Himself is doing such things in you to make you this absolutely beautiful, fruitful garden. And where do you find Christ? Grazing in the garden. He likes to be there and gather the lilies.

And then you hear the heart of the bride. Have you ever noticed? The Spirit and the bride say what? Come. And the Spirit in the bride is never satisfied. Come to Your garden! I mean, that's the cry. Don't you love that when that's true of you? That is such a healthy condition to be in as a Christian. When we are just so unsatisfied; when we ache, because when He comes, there's such a release; there's such satisfaction; there's such joy. Aching for something. When the heart longs after; when the soul is thirsty: Come, Lord, come to Your garden! Come! Come graze! Come gather the flowers. And isn't it such the desire of the Christian that you desire that when He comes, He finds you to be a place that He greatly delights to walk in that place; to commune in that place. That He finds it a place where He really is gathering in the spices and the wine. Remember, this wine, this honey, this milk - it's coming from us! You've got to personalize this. This is you! And that ache for this.

So let us take fresh encouragement from all of this. Brethren, how daily we're prone to offend Him. Let's take special encouragement that what we do be pleasing to Him. We could say church of God arise. Desire that Christ would cause the north wind and the south wind - pray that way! Lord, cause the north wind to awake. Why? I want spice. Spice - but not for anyone. You're a locked garden. It's for Him. But isn't that when we're most satisfied? Isn't that when we take greatest joy? I read those words. Jesus said, "I guarded them." Then He said, "they've kept Your Word." I just want to cry when I read that. I want to jump and shout when I read that. "They kept Your Word." Those guys, their faith teetered and tottered at times, and yet "they've kept Your Word." To have Christ find you lovely, desirable, beautiful, a place where He wants to come and graze - what is that? What love that He should do such things to us! And the thing is when our desire is: let my Beloved come to His garden, and He comes, that's it. What's all the world to us when that happens? This is it. This is true Christianity. And we should desire it. That should be our prayer. Lord, come. Come to Your garden. Come. Yes, and cause these winds to blow from whichever direction they need to blow, but make us a richly spice-bearing church.

We're going to have the Lord's Supper now. Because we're thinking on this. Jesus has purchased this at great, great, great expense to Himself. He Himself has bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we might live to righteousness. This true righteousness and holiness has come at great, great expense. We are not a cheap garden. We may feel ourselves unworthy, but we're not a cheap garden. The piece of ground that we're on is expensive ground. And we want to remember right now that which our Lord has done. Sister Jenny, could we get a song maybe? Could we sing "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted," while they're handing out these elements?