

THE CHIEFEST AMONG TEN THOUSAND

A SERMON

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“The chief among ten thousand.” Song of Solomon 5:10

ALL our time last Lord’s day morning was occupied from this text in setting forth the Savior as that which he is nominated in the margin, namely, the standard-bearer; and we will proceed this morning to notice his company; “He is the chief among ten thousand.” We take the ten thousand here to be a definite number meaning an indefinite number, and that they are the representatives of his people; and, indeed, that the ten thousand here, as will appear as we go along, are shown to be his people, and that he is among them. I shall therefore this morning, in order to close my remarks upon this text, notice in the first place *how he is by his people held as their forerunner*; in this also, as well as in every other respect, he is the chief among his people. And then, secondly, and I may say lastly, *the happy position into which the people who are thus associated with him are sure ultimately to come.*

I notice, then, first, *the dear Savior as their forerunner.* And I shall not, in the first part of my discourse, go out of this book of Solomon’s Song to point out what I wish to point out here, because a little farther back in this book the dear Savior is set forth very beautifully in his resurrection, and in that way that embodies everything that is blessed. Hence it is said of him, “Who is this that comes out of the wilderness?” Now Jesus Christ came into the wilderness of sin in a way that no other person ever did; he came into the wilderness of sin to destroy sin. And you cannot dwell too much upon that fact, that he has destroyed sin; that just as Samson slew the lion, and there was only the carcass left, so there is only the carcass of sin left now. Jesus Christ has destroyed sin, sin has lost its power; sin is destroyed as to the power thereof. And when we are enabled thus to lay hold of Jesus Christ, then we come into that experience further on in this book. “Who is this that comes up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?” If, therefore, I would get vitally and really away from sin, it must be by faith in him who came into the wilderness of sin and because he has destroyed sin, has come out of that wilderness. He came also into the wilderness of Sinai in a way that no other ever did; he came there to take its curse and he has taken the curse out of the law, and he was made a curse for us; and my Bible says, and I feel comfortable in the belief of it, that there shall be no more curse. And so even sin cannot be a final curse to the child of God; there

is no trouble can be a final curse to the child of God; there is no loss can be a final curse to the child of God. Job's troubles were great troubles, but they were not any curse to him, no; the Lord turned every curse into a blessing. Jesus Christ, then came into the wilderness of Sinai, and was made a curse for us, and destroyed the curse. You that recognize him in his having done this, he is as surely yours as that you exist; for if he had not died for you and you were not interested in him, you never would really appreciate him as having come into the wilderness of sin, destroyed that sin, and as having been made a curse, and destroyed that curse. This is the meaning of the Savior when he says, "It is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son" now that is generosity if you like, "everyone that sees the Son" blessed thing that we have the Bible, that we have no human standard set up to govern us and to guide us by; "everyone that sees the Son," whether that one be a Magdalene, a thief, a high-flying Saul of Tarsus, let the character be what he may, let his drawbacks and sins have been what they may, if he is before he dies, blessed with visual power to see the Lord Jesus Christ as coming out of the wilderness of sin, coming out of the curse, having endured the same, put the curse away; now says Jesus concerning such, "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son should have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Again, Jesus Christ came into the wilderness of tribulation in a way none other ever did. He was born for adversity, and he came into trouble for us; all that he bare, all that he endured, was for us; so that he has taken the curse out of all our troubles. He came into death in a way that none other ever did; he came and destroyed death, for death could not destroy him; and hereby he rose up out of the wilderness of death. I cannot but believe that it is the resurrection of Christ referred to here in the third, chapter; "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness?" Who is it? Why, Jesus Christ in his resurrection. And what has he done? Look at what he has done in destroying sin, in bearing the curse, taking the curse out of tribulation, and destroying death, the power of death, having taken the sting away; he has hereby delivered us on the one hand from the lowest hell, from eternal wrath to come, and on the other hand brings us into an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away. When we look at what he has delivered us from, and what he brings us to, why, how little, when we look at eternity, the immortality of the soul, how little time things look by the side of the achievement of Emmanuel, God with us! He is the chief, then, among ten thousand; all whose eyes are opened to see Jesus in the respects which I have stated, his own blessed words become fulfilled, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Why our souls go to him as naturally, as it were, I mean by the Holy Spirit putting our souls in frame, as the needle is attracted by the magnet. Jesus is the attraction and the soul that knows a little of this attraction cries out for more of it; as though the church should say, Lord, we know a little of it, and we want to know more of it. "Draw me; we will run after you." We care not how far we leave Satan behind, or sin or the world, or self, or trouble, behind; but "Draw me; we will run after you." He is then the chief of all. Take only this view of him, what rest it gives the soul! But again, you will observe that Jesus Christ thus came out of the wildness in all respects I have stated, by his sacrificial offering and by his intercession. "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?" Those pillars of smoke refer to the sacrificial altar, which stood out of doors, before the temple; and the golden altar where the incense was burned. Here you find Christ is said to come out of the wilderness, like pillars of smoke, to direct our attention to his sacrifice, that he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and then also to direct our attention to his intercession; that the Christ not only atoned for sin, but he interceded for sinners. And then just notice these words: "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense." Now the word *myrrh* means bitterness. And what is it that gives fragrance to his name, but the bitterness of his sorrows? He took the bitterness of sin, he took the bitterness of death, he took the bitter cup; he

was the bruised myrrh; he took all the bitterness. What an infinite and eternal perfume there is in that bitter death which the dear Redeemer underwent! His bitterness is your sweetness; there is a fragrance in his agonies, in his sufferings, in his bitterness, that will melt a heart of stone. I am sure, whenever the Holy Spirit is pleased to entwine our affections with these bitter sufferings of the dear Savior, it makes the heart overflow with love to his blessed name. Much bitterness we all experience, all of us, more or less. You recollect one of old exclaimed in weakness, as many of us do, "Call me not Naomi," that is pleasantness, "but call me Mara," the same word in Ruth as that of myrrh, meaning bitterness; "For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." And those that know something of these chastening afflictions laid upon them will indeed appreciate what the dear Savior has done. He is the tree cut down that takes the bitterness out of everything. When he comes there is a perfume, a sweetness, in wondrous death, that makes us happy. "Perfumed with myrrh." And then comes "frankincense;" there is his intercession. And if you were to ask me where I would go to for this frankincense, I do not know that I could go anywhere better for the frankincense than to our favorite chapter, the 17th of John. Thanks, everlasting thanks, to the blessed God for such a chapter. Here, indeed, are the myrrh and the frankincense commingled. Here is the chapter commencing with his finished work, goes on opening up the prospects of his glory, and then goes on gathering in his people, assuring them that they shall be eternally one with him. "Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." Now the learned have written largely upon that clause, and I could point you to books where we have a long list of Oriental spices brought before us, in order to open up that scripture that I have just named, "all powders of the merchant." But, somehow or another, I do not seem disposed to go that way. I think that the merchant is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. I think that the church is a treasure hid in the field of this world; hid in Satan's field, hid in the field of sin, and hid in the field of death; and I think that Jesus Christ came seeking that treasure; and I think, when he found it, he gave all that he had that he might buy that field; and so, Jesus Christ gave all that he had, and bought the field. And the field is the world, and the devil is the god of this world, and Jesus Christ bought the field in a sense; and therefore, he says, "I have all power in heaven and in earth." And in thus acquiring entire dominion over all the world, he thus acquired the church, and that church is his treasure; the people of God are spoken of again and again as the Lord's treasure. "All the powders of the merchant." I think the spices mean all the doctrines and promises of the gospel; that is what I think; and Jesus Christ savors of them all, and they all savor of him. Is not that the truth? I am right in this, perfumed with all these doctrines. Why, says one, does he savor of election? Yes, he does. Then I do not like it. Don't you? Then the Lord open your eyes, and purify your Egyptian taste, and give you a true Jerusalem taste, and then you will like that part of the savor as well as any other. Name one truth of the gospel of which he does not savor. Does not he savor of God's love, and of his holiness, and of his justice, and of his covenant, and of everything that is blessed that you can name? Here, then, is the chief among ten thousand; here is the myrrh denoting his intercession, his loving intercession; for notice he intercedes for his people lovingly, and there is no intercession like love; no. God, the Father, when he gave his dear Son, interposed for us lovingly; Jesus when he interposed his precious blood, interposed lovingly; the Holy Spirit, when he quickened our souls, and laid home upon our consciences the solemnities of eternity and salvation, did it lovingly. "God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." And all he does with us now, everything, does not matter what it is, whether for us or against us apparently, he does it lovingly.

"Even crosses, from his sovereign hand,

Are blessings in disguise.”

And therefore, while the myrrh denotes the bitterness of his sufferings, and frankincense denotes the sweet and loving way in which he interposes. There is something pleasing in this; I dare not stop to dwell upon it, because the subject is so tempting; but can there be any motive so noble as that of love? Why has the blessed God interposed for you, giving you, his Son? Because he loved you. And why did Jesus’ die? Because he loved you. And why does he abide by us? Because he loved his own until the end. Why do the Father, and the Word, and the Holy Ghost abide by us? Because they love us. “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” Is he not then, thus our forerunner, the chief among ten thousand? And do you not see in this that which is exactly suited to you, and the way in which the Lord is on your side?

But let us come back to these ten thousand. Now, as the Savior is spoken of here as a standard-bearer (and the standard embodies the idea of his being a Mediator), it implies that his people have something to do. And now I am going to tell you what the people who are with him, and to whom he is the chief among ten thousand, I am going to tell you some of the things now that they have to do. The first is this, that as Jesus Christ has come up out of the wilderness in the respects I have stated, and has entered into rest, it is for the people of God to defend that rest. They know what the rest is, and they are to defend it. They are to stand fast, and they are to admit no adversary in, no false god, no false doctrine; they are to stand fast, and stand out decided for what Christ has done, and hereby defend that rest that remains unto the people of God. It reads thus “Behold his bed;” that is, the rest. Banish, if you can, from your minds, the idea of a literal bed, and take the word *bed* there to mean *rest*; and you may go back, if you think proper, to the first paradise, and let that be alluded to as the rest; or you may go to the land of Canaan, which perhaps, would be more likely that which is alluded to. “Behold his rest, which is Solomon’s;” the peaceful rest into which Christ has entered. And it is said that “threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war; every man has his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night.” In all ages Satan has had his agents at work, if possible, to spoil our rest. And how would they do so? Why, by robbing us of that perfection we have in Christ, and of the sure promise of the Lord’s continued mercy to us by Jesus Christ. Now these valiant men I take to be not merely ministers, but all the people of God; they stand out for the rest. When Jesus Christ has done everything, and men come to set up something to do, when the fact is it’s all done, we must immediately draw the sword of the Spirit, stand against such. No Puseyism, no Catholicism, no free-will, no duty-faith, duty-faith is nothing but free will in disguise; duty-faith is nothing but the devil in a modern dress; and duty-faith associated with a vast amount of doctrinal truth is nothing but delusion; it is that which beclouds the Savior, and interferes with our rest, and sets aside, in a great measure, the work of the Holy Spirit and the sovereignty of God. And therefore, you must stand out against all that, and stand fast for what the Savior has done. “Every man has his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night.” And it is always very pleasing when there is a people ready to stand with the minister in thus contending for that rest. Hence, who has ever read the conduct of the Judahites that has not felt a great contempt for them? I have felt my mind heave sometimes at their conduct. When Samson was laboring to work out the freedom of the Israelites, and to free them from the yoke and burden of their adversaries, that they might have nothing to do but rest, enjoy their harvests, enjoy their vintage, defy their foes, and be happy, why, these Judahites were so frightened at Samson’s mischievous proceedings that they said, “We are come to bind you.” Set of cowards! How many hypocrites are there in congregations now that would

bind the minister, if possible, by some deed or another, and he is to preach so, and so, and try to get him to enter into an agreement to confine himself to such and such sort of preaching! I do not know whether there be any minister mean enough, dastardly enough, to do such a thing; but I do bless the Lord that there are some ministers who are favored with a people that stand with them and that stand by them for the defense of the gospel. Therefore I take these valiant men to be men that have in their souls such an experience of the blessedness of what Christ has done, that each can say with the apostle, and happy the man that can, "None of these things," these things that are set against me, or these things that are abroad, whatever adversaries, counted, as the apostle says, the offscouring of all things, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." They must be valiant men, then, every man with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night. And all the time we are in this world it is comparative night. There are a great many about in disguise in a variety of ways that creep into churches to bring people into bondage. Hence the duty-faith party, might as well say so, and I shall say so, that the large duty-faith party now, they are buying up all our little chapels, or rather getting them more by foul means than by fair means; they manufacture their parson, they send him; he is taught before he goes what actions he is to perform, in what way he is tragically to affect the people's passions, and in what way he is to have a quotation or two from some novel, though the people do not think it comes from a novel, to raise their wonder; but there is a majority on his side, and in a weeks you find the chapel out of the hands of the lawful possessors of it into the hands of duty-faith. This is what they are doing now; but, however, they will proceed no farther than the Lord shall permit; for as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses only up to the point that God suffered and their folly was manifest, so it is now; for the Lord will take care of his own. We have not only thus to profess and follow the gospel, but we have to suffer for the gospel, to stand out in defense of the gospel and not to say, "a confederacy" with every one that would say "a confederacy." But to stand firm and decided, so that we may at that last say with the apostle, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all of them also that love his appearing." Thus, then, here is the forerunner, and here is the rest into which Christ has entered. I cannot describe that rest. Jesus Christ is infinitely and eternally at ease concerning what he has done. He sees the travail of his soul, and if he had to do it over again, he would do it precisely the same. Now you and I, if we had to live our lives over again, we say, "Well I would avoid this, and that, and the other." So, we would; I dare say we should avoid some of the mistakes we made we should make about ten more; that is about the hand we should make of it; and therefore, we had better go on just as it is, depend upon it. Now Jesus Christ I say, is perfectly at ease concerning what he has done. He looks back, not a thought wrong, not a word, not a word. God the Father is perfectly at ease; the Holy Spirit is perfectly at ease. Hence "the Spirit of God rests." He rests "upon you." And those who are already in glory are perfectly at ease, as happy as possible; do not want any warriors there, there is no night there, and therefore no fear of the rest being disturbed there. But while we are here, those of us who have found our rest, we should be traitors, dastards, unworthy to be called the soldiers of Jesus Christ, if we did not stand out for and contend earnestly for that rest into which the people of God shall enter. But there is another thing. Here is the forerunner, here is the rest into which he has entered; and the same rest shall his people enter into; and then the next thing is, here is the chariot to gather in the people that are waiting. It is a beautiful representation, Christ being represented as the Forerunner, and entering into rest; and his people on earth contending for that

rest; then comes the chariot to bring the people into that rest. And I think that Solomons chariot here spoken of means the gospel, I think so; and that gospel is for the gathering in of poor sinners, as indeed the description shows. "King Solomon made himself a chariot." The gospel is something that is made. Mark the king himself, he made it himself. Now God himself made the gospel. The devil and the Pope it is true they have made a gospel, and the Church of England, they got some materials out of their own head, and some out of Popery, and some out of the Bible, and they have knocked up a gospel, such a one as it is. Arminius, he knocked up a gospel, and Socinius, he made up a gospel. Now all these are the gospels of men. But God's gospel is that of his own making. Perhaps there is a difficulty in understanding precisely the spiritual meaning of the several parts, or at least making it clear to others. He made "a chariot of the wood of Lebanon;" cedar was common to Lebanon. And if I were to spiritualize this part, I should say that it means the gospel as declarative of the manhood of Jesus Christ. "He made the pillars thereof of silver," to denote that the gospel is based upon purity; if silver be a figure of holiness, then the gospel is certainly based upon holiness. In our creation we were based upon holiness; God created man, man was holy, and that was our foundation, that was our root, we were based upon that. But then sin came in and robbed us of that holiness, and as you see, awful consequences followed. But no such thing can happen in relation to Jesus Christ. The gospel of the blessed God is founded upon the holiness of Christ, upon Christ's perfection; that is, upon the perfection of his work. "The pillars thereof of silver;" upon holiness; and based upon that it can never give way. And "the bottom thereof of gold." I take to denote the richness of the gospel; and "the midst thereof being paved with love," I take to denote the kindness of the blessed God; and "the covering of purple;" the covering was for defense; so if you read the 121st Psalm, "The Lord is your shade upon your right hand; the sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;" that is as you stand in Christ, there you are liable to no evil; "he shall preserve your soul." Now this gospel is said to be for the daughters of Jerusalem. So then here is Jesus Christ entered into rest; here are his people brought to defend that rest, and here is the gospel by which others shall be brought in. And now just see, for I cannot leave this part without noticing, if we are converted, there is a most solemn question arises, and that is: What are we converted to? Yes, people say, I am converted to Christ. But, my hearer, what kind of Christ are you converted to? This is the great question. You may try, but you will find, whatever men do, God will never sever his truth from himself, he will never sever his truth from his dear Son. Now then, the people that are thus gathered to this chief among ten thousand, they are gathered into a certain relationship. "Go forth, O you daughters of Zion;" that is, those who are believers in Jesus Christ, for he is King in Zion, he reigns in Zion, where God, as the God of Zion, has commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. Therefore, the daughters of Zion are those who are brought away from Sinai and are thus brought to believe in Jesus Christ. "And behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." The mother there perhaps may mean the Old Testament church, and the Spirit may be there looking forward to the time when Christ should rise from the dead, for when Christ rose from the dead it was the day of his espousals, when he espoused the cause of the little church he then had on earth, though that little church has indeed grown into a thousand, and become, according to prediction, a strong nation. "The day of the gladness of his heart," I think means his success in establishing that eternal relationship subsisting between him and the church.

Now, if you go to the 54th of Isaiah, there you have, "Your Maker is your husband," and I need not, because I am so often upon that ground, but it is so beautiful, and comes in so nicely where

we now are, that I cannot omit it, where we have the Lord's matrimonial oath there, that "This is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you." Now, are we gathered into this? are we gathered into this eternal relationship? There is no room for free-will here; there is no room for duty-faith here; there is no room for creature efforts here; creature efforts are efforts of the flesh, and all flesh is as grass. The Lord has sworn that he will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you; that is, not angry with you as you stand in Christ. Do not you find, now, in your own soul, that the closer you are enabled to cleave to Christ, in what you are in him, the more comfortable you are, the less you are frightened at your sins, that is, the less you despair? You get away from the Savior, and get reasoning with yourself, and contrast your faith with your unbelief, your creature experience with your Christian experience, the little good that is about you with the great deal of bad that is about you; you will put the bad that is about you in one scale, and your little faith, and little hope, and little prayers in the other, and your badness weighs down your goodness, and down you go, Ah! I shall be lost. Oh, you silly thing; why, you are reckoning without Jesus Christ. The Lord says, "Come, let us reason together." Never attempt to set your faith, and your love, and your hope, over against your badness: the devil will laugh at such a fool as that. The devil will say, Look at that fool; he has not sense enough to put Jesus into the scale; he has not sense enough to take Jesus Christ into the reckoning. So that poor, silly creature, because he has not goodness himself to overcome his badness, thinks he shall be cut down. But you see that the Savior says, "In me you shall have peace." Now, when you are enabled to take into account what Jesus Christ has done and take into account God's immutable oath that he will not be angry with you nor rebuke you, well, suppose you sin; well, then, your faith in Christ exempts you from the consequences of it. "If any man sin" and there are some people commit more sin in reproving others than the people they reprove, because they are as proud as the devil, congratulate and worship themselves, so we ought to mind, when we reprove others, in what spirit do we do it, lest we commit more sin in reproving others than they themselves commit, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" that is John's way of dealing with the matter. But suppose I am rebellious, and I get into a dead and careless state, will not the Lord be angry with me then? No not if you have faith in Christ. If you choose to come away from that, and to meet the Lord on ground of your own doings, then he will be angry with you, of course; there will be no reason why he should not. But if you cleave to Jesus, and say with the Psalmist, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only," then there is no reason why he should be angry with you. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed says the Lord." How does he wind up the whole? How can this be, Lord? How is it I am so free from your wrath, and feel so sure you will abide by me? Why, mercy, "says the Lord, that has mercy on you." That is how he sums up the whole.

I will now hasten to notice, and it must be very briefly, *the ultimate blessedness into which the people who are thus associated with Jesus shall be brought*. Hence our text seems to have some reference to the 33rd of Deuteronomy, because there is the same term used there, that of ten thousand, where the people of God are nominated by the same words; "The Lord came from Sinai" that I take to mean a transition from the law into the gospel, "and rose up from Seir unto them" same thing, transition from the law into the gospel, "he shined forth from mount Paran," Paran signifying comeliness. Sinai signifies enmity; God has come away from that into love. Seir signifies tempest; he has come away from that into the calm of the gospel. Paran signifies

comeliness. "And he came with ten thousand's of saints", there is the same word, you see, "the chief among ten thousand." "From his right hand went a fiery law for them." I believe we live in a day when men are as ignorant of the law as they are of the gospel. Well, but, say you, the Lord gave the ten commandments to the Israelites, and said he gave them ten commandments to perform. I know he did; I know he did; but there was not one among them ever kept them; not one, not one. What the apostle said of himself is true of every son and daughter of Adam under heaven, that "the law is spiritual; I am carnal, sold under sin." And the man that does not know the law as a fiery law does not know the law at all, not really so. There never was but one person, and never will be, that kept God's law, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. But I will come back to the fiery law for them presently, after just observing, remember one point, friends, the law requires perfect love. He that is angry with his brother unhallowedly, what then? Why, he is a murderer. I do not wish to speak, the Lord forbid I should, speak lightly about such solemn matters, but I have often thought of the poor black man that knew his own heart, and he wished the commandments to be read down to him, that he might see by which of the commandments he was guilty and by which he was not guilty. When it came to the commandment, "You shall do no murder he said, "Me no guilty, me no guilty" The minister said, "I think you are." "Me no guilty", did not like that thought at all. "Now," he said "listen to me. The law reaches to the heart, and if you are angry your brother, without just cause, unhallowedly, you are a murderer." "Ah, den," he said, "me kill twelve people every morning before breakfast, so me be guilty, me be guilty, me be guilty." And so, it is. None but Jesus Christ ever did, ever can, or ever will perform that law. The Israelites, like the rest of the human race, were boasters. There are ten commandments, take them. We will. Do them. Yes, we will do them. But they never did; they never did. I once said I would do them, but I never did. When I was first concerned about my soul, I was determined to be as good as the law was; but the farther I went the worse I got. What then, is the meaning when it is said, "He came with ten thousand's of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them"? The commandment came in its life, and power, and fire, stirred up in me all manner of concupiscence's. Says the apostle, "Sin revived, and I died", so that the law convinced him of sin, "by the law is the knowledge of sin."