

THE BANQUETING HOUSE

A SERMON

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“He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” Song of Solomon 2:4

WHEN the Lord sent Elijah to the brook Cherith, the Lord well knew that that brook would soon dry up; he had, therefore, in store for Elijah another little resource, to last him a little while, by which Elijah, the woman of Zarephath, and her son, should be preserved from death. Presently comes the great sacrifice, and then the abundance of rain, and then all thought of want, or famine, passed away. And just so our little brooks of temporal comfort will presently certainly dry up; and while one dries up, the Lord has another little resource for you there, and another there, little and little, until all is gone. Happy, then, the people whose eyes are opened to see that all these temporal brooks must dry up, and thus to be made prudent, so prudent as to foresee the evil, and to fly to God, to hide themselves from the coming destitution, and to be found in that house where want can never come, where there is bread and to spare, and where sorrow can never enter, even that house that is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; for the banqueting house here will mean not only the gospel, and Jesus Christ, but it will mean God himself, it will mean everything that pertains to our eternal welfare; it is only one of those representations of that plenty and blessedness belonging to all who are brought to God. Oh, it is a great thing indeed if you can this morning leave the house of God with the language, in your experience and in your hearts, of our text; you will in that include everything “He brought me,” the Lord himself came, and showed to me, or I was shown, what a state I was in, and I was shown that I needed that which the Lord alone could bestow; and he made his name to me as ointment poured forth; he became so attractive to me, that that degree of attraction with which his name attracted me, made me long to be more attracted, and made me say, “Draw me, and we will run after you;” made me say, “Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that tuns aside by the flocks of your companions;” so that I am able to look back and see how the Savior’s name became attractive to me, how he drew me along from time to time by the charms of his blessed name, when he comes and speaks by similes that are the most pleasing and the most familiar. “I am the Rose of Sharon,” what can be more pleasing than that? “and the lily of the valley.” Yes, said the church when thus drawn, “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons, I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

I will notice our text this morning in a concise form first, *the saving attraction*; secondly, *the mark of distinction*: “his banner over me was love.”

First, *the saving attraction*. Now this saving attraction is by conformity of taste. When the soul is born of God, that soul then has, of course, a thirst for God, which no man while in a state of nature can have. When the soul is born of God, it has a living and a solemn desire after God, which the natural man cannot have. When the soul is born of God, it very soon sees an excellency in godliness that infinitely surpasses everything that the man ever did see before; and he says, if godliness gives me that, there is nothing like it. Therefore, said David unto such as were thus decided for God and for truth, “O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusts in him; and happy the man that can say of the gospel words, the gospel testimonies of God, testifying of mercy, loving-kindness, and his eternal salvation, happy the man that can say that such words are sweet unto his taste, sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. “If so be,” said Peter, “you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” So, he attracts by conformity of taste, I will therefore point out in this part some of the things that are attractive and pleasing to the church. Of course, Jesus Christ himself is the banqueting house; he is the way by which all the blessings of everlasting love are realized, and shall forever be enjoyed. Now, in the 25th of Isaiah, we have a beautiful representation of the provision the Lord has made; “In this mountain,” meaning of course where Christ is, meaning in Mount Zion, meaning in that gospel, new covenant order of things by which we are saved, “shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.” We know where to go for an explanation of this. Let us therefore be careful, and at the same time very simple upon this matter. This provision, you will observe, was to become attractive to all people. “In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things,” and it shall be attractive unto all people; it shall be known unto the ends of the earth. And perhaps I shall do no harm just to repeat, as I go along, that scripture in the New Testament that so prettily, I think, sets forth the explanation of this, where the angel said, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior; and to denote that he is an able Savior, one that will save, it is “Christ the Lord.” Now this feast refers to two things; first, to the work or sacrifice of Christ, and secondly, to the blessings which are by that sacrifice. First, to the sacrifice of Christ. “He that eats my flesh,” said the Savior, the meaning of which, of course, is, that those who believe in my sacrifice, believe that I have borne away sin, believe that I have atoned for sin, that I have wrought by my death redemption from the law, from the curse, from hell, and from the grave, from this present evil world, and from all adversity, from all evil, so that the redeemed shall ere long be brought into such a position, that sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Thus, then he becomes attractive, because he is the way in which sin is forgiven with infinite freedom. God delights in mercy, which is only another way of saying that he delights in forgiving, and I do not see how it can be otherwise than his delighting in forgiving those who are brought to know their need of and to receive the testimony of his dear Son; for as sure as we have a love towards Jesus Christ, God has loved us. “We love him because he first loved us.” And oh, the infinite freeness, the infinite and eternal delight which he has in passing by our sins, forgiving and forgetting them, blotting them out, and that they are never, never to appear against us, any more than the Egyptians could raise themselves from the dead, and bring the Israelites back again to Egypt. When we thus see this sacrifice of Christ, by which we have this forgiving mercy, life, and sanctification and salvation, what a feast it is to the soul; oh, how it delights us. We think, this is

indeed love, this is indeed a Savior, this is indeed gospel; and what is the gospel but good tidings to lost men? Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Therefore, it means in the first place his sacrifice, set forth by “a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.” We must never drive similes too far; for if, when we deal with metaphors and similes, we drive them too far, and make them say more than they were ever intended to say, we thereby get out of common sense into absurdity. The Lord, then, give us wisdom in this matter. Let us, therefore, take the fat things to mean the blessings which are by Jesus Christ. Take, for instance, the promises; and if we take the fat things to convey the idea of richness, of that which is valuable, so the promises of the gospel. Can you find, I cannot, a poor promise? We meet with many poor promises among men; so poor that sometimes it doesn't much matter whether they fulfil their promises or not, because their promises are so poor. Not so with our God: his promises are exceeding great and precious; they all contain such infinite realities, the promises of the everlasting gospel. Shall we be wrong, then, if we take it in this way? First, the sacrifice of Christ, and then the rich promises, including, of course, the idea of their fulfilment, their being carried out; the feast of fat things, that which shall make us rich and happy. “And of wines on the lees well refilled.” We do desire to bless the Lord that he has instructed us in this matter as to what is meant by the wine. I will not here stop to notice what is meant by the wine on the lees well refined, any further than to observe that it conveys the idea of superiority of the best possible wine. And if the wine set forth the cheering comforts of the gospel, is there any blessing like the blessing of the Lord, like the blessing we have in Christ? And we would approach the thought with great care and great reverence, when we say that the wine also seems intended to set forth the blood of the everlasting covenant; but I am sure I shall speak in a way that will find a response in your heart, when I say we cannot speak too carefully and too hallowed or reverently of the blood of the everlasting covenant. When, therefore, we speak of wine, which the Lord is pleased to use as a simile to set the same forth, the Lord enable us to think and speak of it in a way that shall bring good to our souls and glory to his blessed name. You know he does use wine to set forth the same: “This is my blood in the new testament.” Here I dare not enlarge, because I should occupy all your time; but when we look at the precious blood of Christ, see the various things that are said of it, that it cleanses from all sin, that it sends the prisoner out of the pit wherein there is no water, that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and that we are to appear in all the triumphs of his achievement, and our song is, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood;” and it matters not whether the few or the many, they all came to heaven in that same way, they all washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It was a great declaration of the Savior to make, and it shows the dignity, greatness, infinity, and eternity of his person, and the perfection of his work, when he said: “No man” let him be as good as he may, or come from where he may, “No man comes unto the Father but by me.” And the apostle implies the same truth when he says, “Brethren, by the blood of Jesus we have boldness to enter into the holy of holies.” Here is the banqueting-house the margin reads it, “the house of wine,” carrying out our idea. And we learn from the Book of Esther that at the house, or banquet of wine, you might ask the king any question you liked, and you would be pretty sure to get your way: that is, supposing you were a friend, not an enemy. Now Esther was a friend. She loved the king, and the king loved her; therefore, she had good ground to go to the banquet of wine, where she could ask any question. But Haman was not a friend: he asked some questions, but he didn't get his way. So, we may come into a profession of the name of Jesus, but if secretly we hate his truth, his exaltation, and his order of things, we may pray where we may, but the Lord will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear comes upon us. But if reconciled to him, then the question at this banqueting-

house is, "What is your request, and what is your petition? It shall be granted unto you to the half of the kingdom." But our God does not do things by halves: "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom and Daniel said that "the whole kingdom under the whole heaven was given unto the saints of the most high God." At this banqueting-house, this house of wine, you may make mention of atoning blood; and do you think you can ask for anything greater than that can bring to you? Do you think you can ask for anything more valuable than that can bring to you? Do you think there is anything too valuable for that blood to bring to you? Do you think there is anything too glorious, too great and too blessed, too joyful and too noble, for that atonement to bring you to? No. Here is the banqueting-house. What can we say this morning? Can we say that this house is attractive to us, that we are thus drawn to God, that we do love to meet our God in this house of sacred and heavenly wine, that we do love to meet our God here, where there is bread enough and to spare?

But let us look at the surroundings of this banqueting-house, the circumstances connected with it. It is all pleasant, very pleasant. In the first place, all the people, by being thus drawn, undergo a complete change in themselves. There they are, covered, clothed upon with mortality; but when brought to Christ, they put on Christ, and mortality is virtually gone, immortality takes its place; they are born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever. Therefore, "he will destroy in this mountain" where this banqueting-house is, "the face of the covering cast over all people." Oh, how different will be the face of the brother or sister that we put down into the grave when they come out. We put them down mortal, they come out immortal; corruptible, they come out incorruptible; weak, they come out mighty; in the earthly image, they come out in the heavenly: what a mighty change! How great is the meaning in that Scripture, "He shall destroy the face of the covering east over all people." And then their ignorance shall be destroyed: "and the vail that is spread over all nations." What is the vail? It shall be described like this: "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." This darkness is destroyed; and the gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, setting forth Gods pure and eternal mind and precious thoughts concerning us, has shone into our souls. And what are their eyes opened to see? I can only give a sample here: their eyes are opened to see that death is swallowed up in victory. Ah, what a Jesus Christ is this! what a God is this! what a gospel is this! And then their eyes are opened to see that God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces; not a sorrow, or a sorrowful one left. And not only so, but "the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth and God himself challenges all heaven, all earth, all time, and all hell, to lay a single fault to the charge of his elect. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." Thus, then, here is conformity of taste. What say you this morning? Can you say that the gospel that sets forth this provision suits your taste? Can you say that the gospel that thus shows how death is swallowed up in victory suits your taste? Can you say that this gospel that thus shows the way in which all tears shall be wiped away, all rebuke taken away, and we presented eternally free and triumphant, even as the Savior himself is, suits your taste? If so, you will cleave unto the Lord your God, and, like the prodigal, you will be glad to tarry at home; you will never want another dwelling; you will never want to go elsewhere; there you will be happy.

Now, I have something else to do this morning besides setting forth these things that are attractive,—these things that are expressive of what is meant by the banqueting-house, or house of

wine, where God and the people are forever to be happy: we must say a word or two upon discrimination, for the subject is the same as that contained in the New Testament, where the king made a marriage for his son, and there were certain persons that professed to be his subjects, and he sent his servants, ministers, and said, "Come to the marriage." No, I shan't come; I don't like that eternal election; I don't like that doctrine of eternal oneness between the King's Son and the Church. I shan't come. I don't like completeness in him without the work of the creature; I shan't come. Well, you profess to be a Christian. I can't come upon those terms. Very well, then you won't come to the marriage. Then go and ask the others; they profess to be servants. Oh, they make light of it. It's all very well, but we think nothing of election; we think nothing of that divine perfection. And so, they went one to his farm, and another to his merchandize, they walked off. We don't trouble ourselves about doctrine; we are Christians, it is true; we were sprinkled, or baptized, as they call it, and confirmed. They made light of what the Christian feels to be the weightiest of all matters, faith, judgment, and mercy; light of the blood of the everlasting covenant; light of the victory of Christ; light of the way in which the soul is saved; and off they went. Well, the Lord says, We will go on proclaiming the marriage; and then some got so angry that they despitefully treated and killed his servants: and then he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers; referring of course to the destruction of the Jewish nation, and to the judgments that should come upon all his adversaries afterwards. So, you see here these men professed to belong to the Lord; but they had no taste for free grace, no taste for truth.

Well, the wedding was furnished with guests, and the king came in, and there was one that had not on a wedding garment. I think the 10th of the Romans will explain this; "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Then comes one of the most delightful and sweeping declarations in the Bible; "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes." If I am brought to know my condemnation by the law, and I believe Christ to be the end of the law for righteousness, he is the end of the law for righteousness to me, and thus by him I am justified from all things. There is a sweeping declaration again; "Justified from all things." Why, if the devil could bring all the sins of the human race, and lay them to your charge, if you were found in Christ's righteousness, they could not touch you. "Justified from all things," notice that; we stand by that righteousness eternally free as Christ is free. Now when the king came in, this man had not *on* a wedding garment; then a little further on in the parable it is said he *had not* a wedding garment First he had it not on; secondly, he had not got it at all; he had not got it with him. If he had got the garment hanging on his arm, How is it you have got the garment hanging on your arm? Oh, it is such a beautiful garment I am afraid to put it on; I am afraid the king will order it off again; he has power to do so. If they had said to the prodigal, Put that robe on; Oh it is too good for me; and so with Joshua, Joshua, put that robe on; No, Lord, it is too good for me; I can't think of such a thing as that. "Well, then, clothe him with change of raiment; he will be afraid to put it on himself. But this man had not even got the garment with him. If he had got it with him the king would have pitied him, and said, What is the matter, poor soul? Oh, I have got this robe, but I am afraid it is not mine. Oh, put it on; I am the king, I have power, put it on. And if anyone had said afterwards, Take that robe off; No, that I won't, for the king told me to put it on. And so, if Mordecai had put on royal apparel without the king's order, some inferior would have come and said, Mordecai, take that off, what business have you with it on? But Mordecai could say, I have it on by royal authority,

and I am on this steed by royal authority; and thus, shall it be done to the man the king delights to honor. But this man had not even the robe. Now many of you have got the robe, but you have never put it on at all yet; that is to say, you do believe that if you are justified it must be by Christ's righteousness alone; you believe in it, and you carry it about with you, but you have never been able to put it on, and you never will be. Why, say you, that is discouraging. No, you will never put it on, but the Lord will step in some day and put it on; and then peace will flow into your soul, and you will be so happy you will say, with the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God;" for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." But this man had not the wedding garment. Hundreds of you have; yes, bless the Lord for ever and ever for making us know that all our righteousness's are as filthy rags, and making us prize his righteousness. Now when the Lord asked him, "How did you come in here without having a wedding garment?" he was speechless. What is the reason he was speechless? I will tell you. Go to Isaiah, and ask him how he came by that peace that is recorded of him in the 6th chapter, he could have told you; he would not have been speechless. Go to Joshua the high priest, and ask him how he came by that robe, he would not have been speechless, Go to the prodigal, and ask him how he came by the robe, he would not have been speechless. Why, then, was this man speechless? Because he was utterly destitute of Christian experience; he could not say a word about conviction of sin, he had never felt it; he could not say a word about soul-trouble, he had never felt it; he could not say a word about his poverty and destitution, he had never felt it. "Friend, how did you get in here?" I came in with the rest. Ah, that will not do; religion is a personal thing. Where is your soul trouble? where is your conviction of your need? If you profess what you do not feel your need of, your profession is only profession. What is the reason for the hope that is in you? He was speechless, because he could give no account of a work of grace in his heart; no work of grace had ever been begun. I know in our day there are some good people fear if they come before the church, they will not be able to say anything. Yes, they will. If you have been in soul trouble you can say a few words about it; and to those of us that have known the Lord for a long time, if you say half a dozen words, and they are expressive of the bruised myrrh, the broken down spirit, the tried soul, there will be a fragrance from the bruised myrrh that will come forth, and we shall feel that your few words are better than very many words; contain sweet evidences of life in your soul; and you will be able to say a word or two of how you were severed from delusion, and brought to hope in the Lord alone. There is the command to be baptized, and you using all sorts of ingenious, roundabout, long arguments to keep yourself out of it. There is not one of you that are not Baptists as easy as we are; we are as easy and comfortable as to our being right as can be; there is the command there is the ordinance, and there is the promise. And I hope the Lord will deal with you by and by as he did with the woman, she had got the blessing, and she was walking off quietly. She said, I don't mean to join the church. Ah, but I think you will. And so, the Savior said, "Somebody has touched me," taken a believing hold of me, for there is a power exercised that has healed body and soul. And so, the woman then came before the church, before the minister and the people; Christ was the minister, the disciples were the people; and she told them all that the Lord had done, and never regretted it, you may depend upon it. Now the reason this man was speechless was because he had no experience to tell; he could give no account of how he came by his profession. He was speechless. It is not about saying much, the apostle said, "I will know not the speech," it is not the long speech you may make, "but the power" that you have experienced in bringing you down as a poor sinner, and the power you have realized to raise you up into the hope of the gospel. Thus, then, the man who has this experience of his state, and

knows his need of Christ, he is the man that can say, "He," the Lord, "brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." And he has brought you to where you wish to stay forever. Do you read that the prodigal ever wished to leave his home after he got back again? Not he; he would say, I have got a good father, a good robe, a good home, good company. They began to be merry, and you never read that they left off. And just so, "we shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy temple."

But lastly, *the mark of distinction*, "his banner over me was love." The word "banner" has in the holy Scriptures a variety of meanings, but all expressive of love. In the first place where it is mentioned it signifies victory, when the Lord gave the victory to the Israelites in the wilderness. The enemy came upon them when the Israelites were where there was no water. Ah, said the enemy, now they are famished, destitute; now is the time to come upon them. Ah, when we are down, that is the enemy's time; he comes in like a flood. But the Lord came in to give them the victory; "and Moses said, I will call it Jehovah-nisi, the Lord is my banner." "His banner over me was love;" he has given me the victory because he loved me, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Then, secondly, the word "banners", when used in the plural, signifies the testimonies of God's salvation. "We will rejoice in your salvation; in the name of our God will we set up our banners. Every testimony of the gospel is expressive of God's love. And then, again, the word "banner" refers to the especial and gospel truth of the new covenant. "You have given a banner," that of course refers to Christ, "to your people, that it may be displayed because of truth." There have been a great many make-believe saviors, but this banner of Christ is to be displayed because of the truth; no make-believe about him, no failure about him. "Because of truth." Oh, how truthful he was; how truthful is the holy Scripture upon his grace, work, love, and everything pertaining to him. Then, again, the word "banners" is used in a way I hardly dare trust myself to speak of, it requires care. I think it is Toplady who says that it requires a double amount of sacredness of mind to read with advantage the Book of Solomon's Song; and there is some truth in that. But the word "banner" is used in this book in a wonderful way. The Savior represents himself as overcome, as carried away; he represents the church in her charms as being irresistible; as though he should say, If I had had to have died a thousand such deaths as the one I did die, such are the charms of the church in what she is constituted in God's eternal decree that I could not resist them. "You are beautiful," he says "O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. He was carried away in the counsels of eternity, he is carried away with her now. Her charms to him are boundless and eternal. And see the stronger language still, if possible; "Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me." "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, you have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck." Oh, no wonder, therefore, that Jacob should overcome the angel. This, I admit, requires great care of mind, but nevertheless it is a delightful and blessed truth. And how encouraging this is to prayer, and to look to the Lord through the troubles of life, and in a dying hour. We are all, you know, when the Lord hides his face very much afraid of death. Now, after all, what is death? It is only the Savior gathering his lilies, it is only the Bridegroom asking the bride to come home. And when we are afraid to die it comes to this, as though the Lord should say, Well, you have gone to my house of prayer from time to time to see me, and to hear my voice, and you have gone to my book to see me, and to prayer-meetings. Yes, Lord, and we believe we have seen you sometimes. Well, now I want you to come to heaven to see me; but you do not like that. Well, you are a pretty wife! You would go anywhere to see your husband except go home to see him. No, Lord, I am not afraid to go home, but I don't like the way. Oh, I can smooth the way; I can make a dying bed soft as

downy pillows are. "His banner over me was love." He rests in his love, rejoices in his love, glories in his love; he never had anything but love to his church, and never will.

The reason that the inscription was love, is, because it conveys no reflection. If the inscription had been mercy, it would imply the wife had been a poor, miserable thing. If it had been *redemption*, ah! if I had not bought you, you would not have been here. Or, if *grace*, ah but for my favor, you would not have been here. Or, if *salvation*, ah! you were a poor lost thing, and you would never have been here if I had not saved you. So, to avoid all reflection, and to cover all past unpleasantness's, I will have the word *love*. Now, that conveys no reflection; love, that is all. And this is the name he gives her all through the Book. When he tells her of her perfection, he says: "You are all fair, my *love*; there is no spot in you:" and when he wants her to come into communion with him, he says: "Come with me, my *love*." This is the language he uses, because it carries no reflection. So, then, how gloriously the great end will be answered, that she may be perfect before him in love.

May the Lord lead us more and more into these dear mysteries, for his name's sake