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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor
on Thursday Evening, October 3, 1974.

Lesson. Genesis 49.

Who is that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her her beloved?

Song of Solomon 8.5.

This is an exceedingly precious Scripture of divine truth because all who are blessed with life in their souls will covet the blessings that are comprehended by the divine language. I am to say my spirit has been influenced by the Lord toward this Scripture as we have laid to rest two of the Lord's saints this week; Mrs Hawes and Miss Saunders. Both have now fully come into the enjoyment of the language of the beautiful Text. They have come up in all the finality of it from the wilderness.

We shall define 'wilderness' as we develop the subject. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?" There is only one ^{way} to come up, for 'coming up' means an ascent. It signifies going to glory; being fully fitted for the bright abode, the heavenly mansions, and the only way to come up is to lean on our Beloved. A most precious word this is; that a poor sinner should know the bliss of leaning on the Son of God incarnate; He your Beloved. You will know if He is, and leaning on Him is the whole exercise of holy faith in your soul, giving you wisdom, power, understanding to lean on Him as your Beloved.

So we bless God, we thank the Trinity that the two saints have come up in all the finality of it from the wilderness, leaning on Christ. They are safely Home in the heavenly mansions. Not only in their lives: in the sacred solemnities I have had the presence of the Trinity. By sovereign grace the word relates to you who are still here below. We have still before us a few more miles to go. We are pilgrims and strangers, and there is nothing nebulous about it. We have an objective and a glorious Object, and we have an understanding of where we are going. What a blessed expectation it is! If you are going to glory you will get a foretaste of it. If you are going to bliss the Lord will give you a sweet assurance of it; an un mistakeable, heavenly witness in your soul that

will produce a rich assurance of faith.

I will try to dissect the Text and deliver the message to you. You will notice how the Lord opens the word; "Who is this?" I do not propose to stay on this. The Lord knows who they are because He loves them, and because He has called them, and because He has borne all their afflictions, sins and sorrows, and because He appreciates the blessed dispensation He gives living faith whereby they exclusively lean on Him. I have come to begin to realise that it is an act of worship, and the Lord delights to feel His people leaning on Him, relying on Him. If you try to manage without Him there is great dishonour done to Him. He delights to feel all your weight, trust, repose. It is a safe, happy, beautiful life from day to day, to be overwhelmed and to lean on Him: to open your eyes in the morning and know you will never get through only as you lean on Him. It is blessed and precious indeed to Him. The Lord loves to feel you leaning on Him. What delights a good, gracious husband more than to realise his wife leans on him, looks to him and relies on him under God? The Lord delights in His people leaning on Him. He loves to feel your touch; leaning all your weight on Him. Try it more, as helped: lean harder. You will, and I hope it will not be just of bare necessity. You know so well; you are familiar with it in your soul; you know the blessedness of it.

So "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" The Lord knows to night, in Sussex, in Britain, round the world, the Lord knows the precious souls who are leaning on Him. He knows who they are, and you will know. You will know if you are one who leans on Christ as your Beloved. I have been trying to do that this week, and I have found the preciousness of my Beloved and His faithfulness. Mentally, physically, spiritually, relatively, in everything leaning on the Beloved. Are you afraid to acknowledge it? Would you rob the Lord of the glory due to His Name? or are you willing and anxious to say it is how you have lived for many years? If any came to you and said; "Give me the secret of your life as a Christian." and this may be asked of a number of different characters in the Lord's family,- a gracious widow; a poor afflicted saint; a young person who is afflicted from youth up; a business man with a large load; a person in a profession who fears God; a gracious doctor; a godly nurse. A person might say; "My friend, give

me the secret of your life." It would be a perfect answer if you could say; "This is the secret. I come up from the wilderness leaning on my Beloved. That is how I live." If you ask a godly minister, a gracious deacon, a bereaved soul, a trembling spirit pressed with sorrow, sin and trial; if you look at the trials of this year, (I shall not inquire into them) but if you had looked at them five years ago you would have said; "I shall be in the grave." yet there is a secret. What is it? You are leaning on your Beloved. Wonderful this is, and it is the secret of happy dying, of peace in illness, support in distress and anxiety, leaning on your Beloved.

I said the Lord knows who they are. He knows if He feels your weight on Him, and if He feels all your weight He felt it from all eternity, when His Father gave you to Him, when He bore your griefs and carried your sorrows, when He bled and died for you, and as He now intercedes for you, and you know. I am acquainted with the fact that because we are sinners and have strong temptations, and come into days of darkness which are many, servile fears and doubts rise, but listen. I say affectionately to the old; "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." Try to look back over your life, and see how faithful and good the Lord has been to you, and remember His promise; "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Try to 'venture to be nought', to lean on your Beloved. The Lord Help you that you cast not away your confidence. You know, yes, you have known if you are one who leans on your Beloved. As I speak to you to night I cannot doubt it because I have proved Him, and you know, the more I lean on Him the better it is. So you know: you will say Amen; this is the secret.

I will say something else: the people of God know; others know. They know as they look on you that you are leaning on your Beloved. They know by your testimony; by the serenity of your frame, and your humility, and your uncomplaining spirit; your spirit of gratitude; there is not a murmur. They know you are leaning on your Beloved.

I believe there are seasons and occasions when the world knows. They will say; "That man at work; that person I meet; that mother with a family, alone; there must be a supernatural strength, a secret that sustains them. I never hear them complain or murmur. There must be

something that is beyond nature." So it is conspicuous, and the devil knows. How can I prove it to you? Think of it in this way. He knows when he has lost one from Moab; that is, the world. He knows when he has lost one from the far country; one who is returning. He knows when a stronger than he comes and spoils his power and his projects. He knows all who find all he has to offer by way of delight to be a wilderness, and he cannot charm them.

So, "Who is this?" To see the Church of Christ, His spouse, His wife leaning on her Beloved is one of the most delightful views one can have, and it is a blissful experience. You will never get through without it, but you will know more of it. Probably it is in the issue you will see all the beauty and glory of it, but in so far as it is possible you will have a view of Christ here below. We see the patriarch, the prince, the saint of the most High God coming up from the wilderness, leaning on his Beloved. It is all over; all the trials, sorrows, pains, griefs, travail over. "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed," This is faith: the whole of the work of Christ your resting place. He gathered his feet into the bed: no rending, no tearing, nothing violent; no sting, no curse, no terror. He just 'yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.' There you see one "coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved." "Who is this?"

The next term to develop is 'wilderness' and 'coming up', and the method of 'leaning on her beloved.' So what do we understand by 'wilderness'? I feel we should be clear on this point: there should be the greatest clarity, because what is wilderness? It is waste, arid, uncultivated, uninhabited. It was extreme desolation to the Israelites: a place where nothing edible grew. There was nothing to eat in it: their food had to come from Heaven. There were scorpions and drought, but the whole point was, the tremendous contrast between the wilderness and the land of milk and honey. They were passing through it, and it is a wilderness.

So what is a wilderness? You read in the Scriptures a wonderful account of the Creation, and you see the beauties of it around you, and you will have opportunities of seeing further afield. Many people even fifty or seventy years ago had never been to London; they had never seen anything of Britain. The whole pattern has changed, and many of you have seen the

Lakes, the mountains, Scotland, and the Isles off Scotland, and we must say in this beautiful county how marvellous is the fair Creation of God. In the whole solar system this is the only planet where life as we know it is possible, for this, ^{reason} and it is generally acknowledged. Four of the planets are too close to the sun and the heat is so tremendous that no life is possible. Another planet is so far from the sun, it must be a frozen mass. I find it heartening to realise that learned men and women acknowledge that the earth is unique. It was God's special work when He changed chaos into cosmos and created grass, flowers, fruit, mountains, hills; everything that makes this planet beautiful.

So you wonder where 'wilderness' comes in. It is, as you well know, and solemnly and deeply know, the entrance of sin into the world and death for sin and God's curse for sin that makes the world a wilderness. In addition, everything because of the curse withers and dies, though there is the marvellous cycle. The devil and the powers of darkness are in the earth's atmosphere, and to every gracious person this makes the world a wilderness, Tell me; is there anything outside of Christ can do you good? Is there anything outside of the holy gospel can feed your soul or bring you any satisfaction? Nothing. So for this reason; because of sin, the fall of man, the curse for sin, the activity of the devil, plus the corrupt state of mankind the world is a wilderness. You have the external world, and thinking of the wickedness, filth and violence, and the microcosm of it in one's heart, your heart is a wilderness. Your body is a body of sin and death, so it is a wilderness to your redeemed soul. Your flesh and your wicked heart is a wilderness to you. Do we recognise it? Indeed we do: we feel it increasingly. Thank God you are travelling through it: you are pilgrims on the way to the land of promise. You know you have no abiding city here: you realise you have a blessed city above.

Another aspect is daily conflict, trial, sorrow, pain, difficulties make the world a wilderness. They come up from the wilderness. I must postulate this. A city or town or village where there is no Bread of Life in the place; where the gospel is not preached, that city, town or village is a wilderness. Take the gospel (I hope the Lord never will) right away from Hellingly, it would be an absolute wilderness. What is there ~~is there~~ in your life apart from the gospel? Think of Ruth in Moab.

which is a symbol of the idolatrous world. She came up from the wilderness. There was nothing there. How glad Naomi was to return! Bethlehem was not a wilderness. There was field to glean in, living grain edible to the soul is set forth here. This was no wilderness. Babylon was a wilderness to the Israelites who feared God. When they returned they favoured even the dust thereof: the very ruins of the temple were more to them than all the magnificent buildings of Babylon. So Ruth came up from the wilderness.

I have already cited the case of the patriarch. There was the prodigal son: everything suddenly changed for him. All the attractions of the far country became a veritable wilderness. He lost his sensual appetite. All he had thought so wonderful became a wilderness because God changed his heart, and he came up from the wilderness. This is wonderful because it means a complete change of orientation. You are turned about and have a new view and new feelings. Your soul longs for green fields, fruits, the shadow of the tree, - Christ; the beauty of the Lord, and you look on Zion, "the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation." and

"I love her gates; I love the road;
The Church, adorned with grace,
Stands like a palace built for God
To show His milder face." (361)

You have got an objective. When Christ is revealed to you, you begin to run and fly.

"To the dear fountain of Thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly." (764)

and you are coming up from the wilderness. From all the guilt, misery, darkness, bondage, pain, fear, you are coming up. You have seen Christ.

"Here let me wash my spotted soul
From crimes of deepest dye."

You are coming up, my friends. The Spirit of God puts in your mind good, holy desires, heavenly aspirations, a living appetite. He gives you a glimpse of glory. You come up, and it is by degrees. You are looking, walking, drawing nigh, closer, you are there. What is this, 'you are there'?

Calvary. "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock." You have ~~arrived~~
arrived. You have got Home. You are there. Amen.