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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves, at Ebenezer, Clapham on Sunday
Morning June 26th, 1938

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved,
and be Thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether."

Song of Solomon 2, verse 17

In some parts of this Song it is difficult to ascertain who it is speaking; whether it is the voice of the Church or the voice of her Beloved; but in this verse it is clear who is speaking. It is distinctly the voice of the Church, and this in the form of a prayer that her Beloved would be with her, would favour her with the visitations of His grace, would come quickly to her succour in every time of her need, and thus, figuratively speaking, be unto her as a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether, until the day break and the shadows flee away. In the last four verses we have the voice of the Bridegroom and of the bride. The Bridegroom's invitation to the bride, to the Church is: "O, My dove, that art in the clefts of the Rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." This is a sweet invitation extended by the Lord Jesus unto His people, desiring that they may come forth out of the secret places where they may be hidden. "Let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice," for both are attractive to me. "Sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." In these verses we have two different creatures mentioned of very different characteristics. There is a great difference between doves and foxes. The first are emblems of meekness, purity, and harmlessness. "Be ye therefore," said Christ to His disciples "wise as serpents, harmless as doves." But in the fox we have a creature noted for its destroying powers, its subtlety. The Lord compared Herod to a fox; "Go ye and tell that fox," and yet sad it is to observe that there are such characters, who may perhaps be a type of false teachers and prophets, who do great harm and injury to the vine and tender grapes. What injury may be done to some of the Lord's people, even in whom is the tender fear of God, who may here be likened to the tender grapes, whose conscience is made tender in the fear of the Lord; what harm those baneful things may do to them. There may be many foxes in the professing Church who may seek, in a very subtle manner, to overthrow the faith of God's

people, and who may do much injury, especially to those younger in the way; "for our vines have tender grapes." The baneful things of the world may be compared to foxes, which may so easily destroy those vines or at least injure them. Then again we have the fox of unbelief in our own hearts. O what injury this does to us at times. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

Then the Church is enabled to speak of the relationship which she enjoys with her Lord; "My Beloved is mine, and I am His; He feedeth among the lilies." Perhaps it would not be irrelevant to connect this verse with the last verse --- "He feedeth among the lilies until the day break." By this the Church would affirm that the relationship during this mortal state, while the Church is in a waiting state, anticipating a great day not yet arrived, would be sustained by the Lord, that He would be with her and would come down from time to time into the gardens of His grace and feed among the lilies. In another part we read of His coming down, and this in response to the invitation, "Let my Beloved come into His garden" He says, "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse." Thus the Lord communes with His people, with those who are thus waiting for Him; He comes down into the gardens of His grace and receives of the spices that flow out, the sweet fruits of the Spirit that the Lord's people bring forth. He comes down and communes with them. O what a mercy this is, and the presence of Christ will thus be in the Church during her time in this world while here in this mourning state, until that glorious day arrives when there will be a fulfilment of what we were reading in the Revelation (Chapter 7 v.15-17) for them it may truly be said that the day will break and all shadows will flee away. That will be the dawn of an eternal day, after what may be compared to a night of trouble, affliction, persecution, sorrow, anguish and pain, and yet in this state (and this is the state of the Church in this world for the most part) she is favoured with the presence of her Beloved without which she could not endure. Therefore it may be said, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His: He feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break and the shadows flee away." This does not infer that that blessed relationship, and a sweet sense of it at times felt and enjoyed by the Lord's living family here, will cease; rather that then it will be more clearly and more fully manifest, manifest in a brighter and more glorious sense than can be in this mortal state, wherein we are, so to speak

under a shadow. Then the shadows will flee away, and those that see him now by faith, through a glass, darkly, will see Him then face to face, for then all the shadows will have dispersed, and there shall be no night, but one eternal day of blessed communion, uninterrupted, free and full, where the cup will be running over with the blessing of God for ever and ever. But until that day arrives there are many shadows, many shadows. A shadow is a form, outline, or representation of anything which intercepts the rays of the sun. We all know that as the sun rises anything that comes between its rays and us causes a shadow, a moving shadow; as the sun moves round the shadow moves. So it is, friends, in and with the Church here below; she has the presence of her best Beloved, but those sweet communications of His love are intercepted by many a shadow; things come, as it were, between at times that hide Him from her view, but there there will be no shadows. The dawn of this day has not yet broken forth. Meanwhile the prayer is that the Bridegroom of the chosen bride, the Husband, the great Head of the Church, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, will be with His people, "Even as a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether."

"Until the day break." This would point, then, to a certain period of time when something will take place that has not yet been, and the word infers, as I have mentioned, that when the day breaks the shadows will flee away. Now I feel we may look upon this in one or two distinct ways as having a particular bearing upon the Church of God, and as relating to the coming of the Lord Jesus into the flesh. And may it not have respect to the coming of Christ in the flesh? That was the breaking forth of a great day, a gospel day; and very possibly the Church here, in this prayer, may have had this great matter in view. "Until the day break," looking forth to that time when the Messiah, as promised, should come in the flesh. The former dispensation or period is likened by the Apostle Paul, to a shadow; he says that the law is "a shadow of things to come, and not the very image of the things," the shadow, not the substance. The shadow is, as it were, a representation, but not the thing itself; the shadow must necessarily be distinct from it; so the former dispensation, the Mosaic dispensation, is likened by Paul to a shadow of good things to come. Now when Christ came in the flesh all types and ceremonies, there termed shadows under the Mosaic law, have their fulfilment in Him, who was the Substance

of all shadows, therefore it was as the breaking forth of a great day which had long been anticipated by the Church. Thus when Christ came in the flesh the shadows of that dispensation, the darkness, comparatively speaking, that was upon the Church and upon many people, fled away, and He, who was the substance and the fullness of the gospel came. How wonderful all this is! We see Christ prefigured through the old Testament, we see the promise of His coming, but all, so to speak, under a shadow, a representation; but when we come to the close of the Old Testament, we find Malachi there predicting the coming of the Messiah in these words, "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." He closes his prophecy by a forecast of the dawning of that gospel day when the shadows of the Mosaic dispensation should flee away and cease, when the handwriting of the ordinances should be nailed to His cross, and when the middle wall of partition should be broken down, so that there should be neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ All and in All. What a day that was! We have a record of it; the Apostles being filled with the Holy Ghost proclaimed with great boldness the Person of the Redeemer, that He was the Promised One, He that should come, and the great light broke forth, as it were, upon the dark world, and some that were looking for Him saw their anticipations realised; as it had been in the case of Simeon. "Until the day break and the shadows flee away."

But there is something sweeter even than this as it pertains to our particular cases, and that is the coming of the Lord Jesus in the spiritual visitations of His love and grace to individual believers. Now before He comes thus in a way of experience, there is, as it were, a kind of a shadow, a darkness over the mind, a bondage upon the spirit; Christ is not seen by the eye of faith clearly until He reveals Himself. When He comes to a poor sinner, to a believer, and disperses the intervening shadows and clouds and shines into the soul, then this word has a fulfilment. "The day breaks and the shadows flee away." Many a child of God is waiting for Him, looking for His coming, longing for Him, but there is darkness over the mind. They are labouring under the shadows of temptation and inward conflict and fear about their state and case, doubting often if He will ever come to them. O what darkness there is when the Lord's face is hidden! But there is the coming to an individual believer here, and then the day breaks. When He shines

then there is light; the light shines. This is the dawning of the gospel day in the heart, and the shadows of doubt, of fear and unbelief, of distress and trouble, for the time flee away. But O what a waiting this is; and yet the Lord has said, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me." "Until the day break!" Has the Lord ever come to you like this and turned your night to day? You see the day must be preceded by the night season, and I understand that the darkest part of the night is often that which is just before the dawn, and it is like this in experience sometimes. The darkest part, for the child of God, may be just that time which precedes the breaking forth of the Lord Jesus upon his heart. The child of God may be passing through a vale of trouble, deep trouble, having much darkness, but when the Lord comes then it is light with him. Christ is said to be the light of the world; He declares Himself to be this. "I AM the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness." Now some of us may be waiting, as the Church here, for His coming, for the breaking of this day, saying, perhaps, "Lord, when wilt Thou come unto me?" The Lord declared to His disciples that He would manifest Himself to His people. "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." When He comes, then day breaks. He, and He only, can turn our darkness into light, our night into day, but until this day breaks in upon the soul in experience, the prayer is just this, 'Lord, sustain me, keep my faith alive, be near unto me, hold me up in faith and prayer, be like unto a roe or a young hart to me, come quickly to my relief, sustain me in trouble, keep me from falling and grant that in the night of temptation I may be enabled to hold fast; grant that when faith is tried, when things look as black as night, I may be helped to hold fast; keep me and be with me until the day breaks.' What shadows, at times, come over the Lord's children. Sometimes a shadow comes over their faith and they find themselves doubting things that they had been comparatively sure of and strong in previously. They may have a shadow come over the Scriptures, a shadow over their circumstances; and sometimes things come between the Lord and themselves which are as a shadow, but when He appears, then He turns our night into day, and this is the prayer, 'Lord, help me, hold me up, sustain me and keep me, come quickly to my help in this night of conflict, temptation, fear darkness and affliction.' "Until the day break."

Then again, we may look upon this as having application to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. It will be more or less as a time or period of shadows and darkness to the Church until then. That is the day looked forward to by the Church, and which was spoken of by Paul as "the great day of the Lord," when He shall come, not as before in His humiliation, as "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," but when "He shall come in His Father's glory with all His holy angels, to be admired in all them that believe." This is the hope of the saints, this will be the day when those who have fallen asleep in Christ will be raised again, and those who are alive shall not prevent them that are asleep, but they shall rise to meet the Lord in the air. "So," we read, "shall we ever be with the Lord." Now that will be a day, the dawning of an eternal day, to be intercepted by no more shadows, no more sin, trouble, conflict, darkness, sorrow, pain and death. Every shadow will have fled away then; Jesus in His ascended glory will be seen by His people and admired by them then; all shall unite in ascribing praise, honour and glory unto Him. We read, "Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue." That will be a great day, the day to which the saints look forward. Therefore, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." Such will awaken to see the light of a glorious day, a day where the light is never intercepted by shadows; therefore the Lord give us faith while here now in this waiting mortal state to receive and believe what He has declared and revealed, that such a time will come to His people, when His glory in full shall be seen, when they will have a capacity to enjoy it, and to dwell within the light of it for ever. This will be when "the day breaks and the shadows flee away." What a glorious prospect is held forth for the Church, whether it be looking forward as in Old Testament times to His coming in the flesh, which was the dawning of the gospel day, a great day indeed when the shadows of the Mosaic law fled away once for all, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sum and Substance of all shadows appeared upon this earth as the Saviour of sinners; or whether it be the spiritual day of His coming in the soul to bless His people in the visitation of His grace. Many are waiting for this; in fact, if we are spiritually alive we are all waiting for it, often saying, 'Lord come to me, come over the mountain of sin, dispel the shadows between, discover Thyself to my soul, let me see Thy beauty and glory by faith, permit me to sit down under Thy shadow with great delight, for Thy fruit is sweet

to my taste, manifest Thyself to my soul so that I can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." ' For this day we wait, some of us, and long for His appearing unto us. Then there will be the last great day, so clearly set forth in Holy Scripture; when He shall come again in His glory, and the bodies of all who died in the faith and hope of the gospel, whose immortal spirits are now in heaven enjoying that felicity, will be raised again and therefore made complete in Him, and will be favoured to look upon Him in His glory and will be fashioned like unto His glorious body. What a day there is coming!

Meanwhile we are in a waiting state, and would pray for grace to wait on, to look forward, to be revived in our souls, to be refreshed with His presence, favoured with His visitations, desiring that He would be to us "as a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." The margin says, mountains of divisions. Mountains of divisions wherein there are many things which at times divide and separate us from the Object of our love, but all of which are nothing to Him, for He is spoken of as coming, under this figure, "Leaping over the mountains and skipping upon the hills," as though all is nothing to Him, as a roe or young hart, being exceedingly alert and agile, can leap over the mountains and rocks. So Christ can come over all difficulties, being above and beyond the scenes of dejection, and come to the help and aid of His poor and afflicted people. Therefore the Lord help us to pray like this; 'Be this unto me, be my Beloved, give me to feel I am Thine, that Thou art mine, come to my help quickly, and speedily,' answering to the figure here so descriptive --- until. Until. There is a set time prefigured when a full and final relief shall come, when the shadows, the things which attend us now, the difficulties, dangers, troubles and darkness, here likened to the rain, will flee away, when the Church shall say in the most blessed sense, "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." Until then! But O what there may be between, may there not, in the interim! Until then, until the last shadow disperses, Lord, keep me, hold me up, give me to believe what Thy Word reveals, and glorify Thyself in my soul, until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

But I believe we may say, in speaking of the Lord's chosen family, that the day of their decease is but the dawning of a glorious day. While here, you see, in this mortal state there are many shadows, trials, afflictions, disappointments, sorrows and sins, all of which cast a shade, at times, so to describe it, over us, over our faith; but when that time comes, solemn though it is, unspeakably solemn, when heart and flesh shall fail, and the powers of nature give way, soul and body separate, then, death having lost its sting to the redeemed family of Zion, and being but as a sleep wherein they sleep in Jesus, until the resurrection as to their bodies, it will be the dawning of a glorious day. We read and believe too, that the moment when the soul is, as it were, freed from its tenement of clay, it opens its eyes in heaven; the redeemed spirit flies to eternal bliss and the day breaks upon the soul. Then, in such a way as never before, Jesus is seen, seen without, as one speaks, 'the weary veil of the flesh between.'

"Until the day break and the shadows flee away." Amen

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I Fuller and Friends, 9 Sibella Road, London, SW4 6JA