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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on 11.4.51  
Text: Solomon's Song 8.13

"Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it."

This may appear to be rather a strange ending to this very remarkable Song. After a number of expressions which suggest intimacy, communion, friendship, union, affection and love on the part of Christ and His church, such as, "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". "My beloved is mine, and I am his"; "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee"; "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love", now these wonderful expressions of assurance and affection are all as it were in the background and the Song closes with a request that the voice of the church might be heard by Christ. May not this show how, though one may be much favoured or another greatly blessed, while we are here in this time state there will be spiritual changes. There are times of joyous communion, times of enjoyment of the Lord's presence, then times of darkness, for it is said that the days of darkness will be many. So there is at times a shining of the sun, at other times the passing of a dark cloud before it; but though that be so yet the union is not dissolved, the bond is not broken nor is the communion entirely severed. Oh what an amazing mercy it is for a poor sinner to hear the voice of Christ and be comforted, encouraged, strengthened, reprov'd, admonished, helped, instructed, by that voice.

Now I must admit that this word presents some difficulty. It is thought by some that the speaker here is Christ addressing the church, His Bride, and saying, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it", by others that it is thought more relevant to consider it as the language of the church appealing to Christ after this way, saying, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it". But as I may be helped I will attempt some

consideration of it in both aspects, first, as the language of Christ addressing the church and then as of the church appealing to Christ.

In the first place, then, the voice here is the voice of Christ saying "Thou that dwellest in the gardens". It is noticeable how frequently the church is compared to a garden as I have hinted before, "a garden walled around, Chosen and made peculiar ground", a fountain sealed, a garden where the Lord dwells or where He comes. And by gardens perhaps we may understand Gospel churches or assemblies for worship who gather together in this or that place to serve the Lord and to keep His ordinances. These are like gardens gathered out of the world and separated from it, a place designed by the Lord for spiritual fruit-bearing, cultivation, different from a wilderness, a garden for beauty and attraction and fruitfulness. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens". This is where the Lord's people as such dwell, or at least they desire to. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens". So the Psalmist speaks where he says "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord" - dwell, not just come occasionally when it suits me, but dwell, - "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple". This can refer to those who have some communion together and feel to be of one heart and one mind in the things of God and are joined together, if not in church fellowship, yet in a spiritual union to those that are, and who constantly attend upon the ordinances of public worship. They may be said to dwell in the gardens. They continue steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Now this dwelling in the gardens is rather an important point, for it supposes in the first place, this dwelling in the gardens, a spiritual home. There are some who, so to speak, drift hither and thither and have no abiding place in this sense, do not actually dwell in the gardens. They visit this garden, they visit that garden,

but if they are plants in a garden, planted there by the Lord as trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified, they dwell in the gardens. Not that they can be always there, or are necessarily confined always to once place, but of such we may conclude that they are those who have a spiritual home, where at times at least the Lord condescends to meet with them. And not only so; these dwell in the gardens in order to obtain food and to gather fruit. That is one great point of your dwelling in the gardens, seeing that the Lord has ordained the public means of grace unto this end, saying by His servant Paul, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

Now it is very pleasant to go into a vineyard, or a garden, or an orchard when the fruit is ripe and attractive, and gather some and enjoy partaking of it. So it is spiritually when living souls, church-members or not, because it can be possible in some instances even for some to be more lively and earnest who have not yet felt moved or enabled to take that step than some who have done so, but that we can leave. They are spiritual members of Christ's body that dwell in the gardens and receive a crumb here and a crumb there. They would not say that they are always fed; perhaps they would have more if the ministry was better; but still there is at times with those that dwell in the gardens, where the ministry is of God, a little gathering of spiritual food. Moreover, it is a place where at times the voice of the good Shepherd is heard, through the public means. In a hymn or preaching or reading or a prayer meeting. The great object of dwelling in the gardens is to enjoy communion with the Lord through the means of His appointed ordinances.

Not only so; those that dwell in the gardens dwell there to perform a duty or a labour that God in His providence may design for them and whatever that labour may be, they will desire and endeavour by faith and prayer to discharge their duty and their office in the fear and grace of God for the good of their companions.

So those who dwell in the gardens are such as are made alive to Christ, quickened by the new birth, and brought to some spiritual understanding of divine things and to have some work of faith and labour of love for Christ's sake. It is true that there may be attendance upon the means of grace where there is no spiritual life. There may be a constant attendance; but such can hardly be said to be dwelling in the gardens in a spiritual way because the soul is not alive to God, there is no spiritual exercise in divine things or communion with the Lord's spiritual people, no spiritual communion with the companions.

"Thou that dwellest in the gardens". This then is the voice of Christ speaking to those inhabitants of the gardens, that is to say those who assemble themselves together or are united in one spiritual bond. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice". What may we understand by these companions? You see as a rule the Lord's people have not very many companions, they walk much alone in a sense, but not altogether alone for they walk at times with the Lord Himself and they walk with His people too. They have a few companions, that is to say those who are of a like mind with themselves. Now in real companionship, not just a superficial friendship, but in real companionship, there is confidence, mutual confidence, because you would not consider one a companion in a proper sense in whom you had no confidence. As a spiritual person you could not have confidence in another, in spiritual things, where there was no spiritual life or where the tracings of that life were not clear to your view. No, there could not be that close companionship; you would want to feel confident not only of a work of grace in their souls but also of their character. But when there is a mutual bond, and communion is enjoyed in this way, there is companionship. There is something more than confidence, though connected with it, and that is agreement. Now it is very choice to have a real companion, is it not? One to whom you can open your mind, and in whom you can confide, express your feelings, exercises, walk together in

the things of God, for the most part at least, and also even in a natural sense. It is very sweet to have a companion, even if you have only one real companion. Loneliness, solitariness, is not desirable, for even the Lord Himself said that it was not meet for man that he should be alone, "I will make him a helpmeet for him". It is very sweet to have a few real companions. But there is something beside agreement, and that is communion and intercourse, mutual exchange of heart feelings at times. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written". There are those in the church of Christ, these companions, those that are gathered together and are more or less joined together in a spiritual union. "O thou that dwellest in the gardens".

Now notice, the Lord is speaking here, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice, cause me to hear it". Now I want to point out something rather particular here, the Lord speaking appears not so much to speak to the companions generally but seems to address one particularly. It is not just a general observation that is made here. Thou, thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice, cause Me to hear it; this one thou, O where is this one? Perhaps there is one in this assembly here. Here are some companions, that is to say some dwelling in this garden, in this church or this assembly, who enjoy some communion together, they talk together, exchange their exercises, feelings, desires, trials, difficulties and so on; they speak together. "The companions hearken to thy voice", as though the Lord would be addressing one and say O thou, you, you speak to your friends, you can talk to them, you tell them what you feel, your companions in the Lord, you seem not to be shy of them, they hear your voice, they hearken to it and they understand what you feel, "The companions hearken to thy voice; cause Me to hear it", O thou, this one who perhaps may not feel to be very much like the companions, but yet is one of the doves that has got into the secret places of the stairs, as we read in the second chapter, "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." Let Me hear thy voice. You talk to your companions and the Lord would not say "Do not say anything to them, do not talk to them", O no, He does not mean that at all, but you speak to your companions, speak to Me, let Me hear thy voice. There is an attraction in the voice to Me "for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" "Cause Me to hear it", that is to say bring your case to Me, be not afraid, be not afraid to come.

"Why art thou afraid to come?  
Why afraid to tell thy case?  
He will not pronounce thy doom;  
Smiles are seated on His face."

Let Me hear what you have got to say, speak to Me. Come unto Me.

Now this is the Lord's own voice speaking, the Bridegroom, the Shepherd, "Come unto me", He says, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". Let Me hear thy voice, let Me hear it in confession. Did He not hear the voice of the church in confession in the Song? "I am black", she said black as the tents of Kedar, that was how she felt and perhaps this one, thou, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens", perhaps you say, Oh but I am not worthy to come with my case to Him. Who said that? If Christ says you are not fit to come and that He will not receive you on account of that, then you may have reason to fear. It is true that you will feel unworthy, unfit to approach Him; but the approach is made upon the ground of His own invitation. "Ask and ye shall receive"; "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". Come let Me hear thy voice, "Cause me to hear it". Does He hear your voice? "Thou that dwellest in the gardens", does the Shepherd hear thy voice? Does He hear it at times in a heart-felt confession of your unworthiness and of your sins? Does He hear your voice in prayer for mercy and forgiveness? "Purge me with hyssep, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Does He hear your voice, "O thou that dwellest in the gardens"? And does He hear it in acknowledgment of what He has done for you, in

thankfulness, in some praise and thanksgiving that He should ever have manifested His mercy to a base, unworthy mortal like you? "Cause me to hear it". Well now, have you "O thou that dwellest in the gardens", got anything that you want the Lord to do for you? Have you got a case, a burden, a difficulty, a trial, a hard thing, a bitter thing? Speak to the Lord about it, take it to Him, cause Him to hear it. What is it that one hymn writer says, something like this,

"Were half the breath thus vainly spent  
To heaven in supplication sent,  
Your cheerful song would oftener be,  
Hear what the Lord has done for me."

Have you a complaint? Well cause Him to hear that complaint. Do you feel to be in a dark, desolate state, apart? "Cause Me to hear", go to Him, venture boldly to the mercy seat with your desolation and bondage and darkness, difficulties and burdens, afflictions and trials. Speak to the Lord about them. "Cause Me to hear thy voice".

Well, that is one interpretation of this verse; but just for a few moments let us look at it from the other standpoint, that is as the church addressing Christ. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it." Does not this seem to fit in just a little better with your feelings? You look up in your desires, your faintings and your love, toward Him, the Bridegroom of the bride, you look up as it were in your longings, being troubled by His silence and say, "O thou that dwellest in the gardens", - Lord is not the church Thy dwelling place; didst Thou not appear to Thy disciples and stand in the midst of them when they were assembled together and dost Thou not dwell in the heart of Thy people and form Thyself there the hope of glory? Is not Thy presence in Thy church where Thy people assemble together to keep Thy ordinances? - "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice" . It is as though you would say, Lord Thy silence grieves me, wounds me, troubles me. Does it? Is there one here anything like that, who mourns for the time being at least the Lord's silence and

yet would say, Lord, my friends, my companions, those to whom I hope I feel a little union, they get some help sometimes, they get a token for good, some of them get blessings, they get on better than I do, Lord; I seem to be left out. The companions hearken to Thy voice, they hear Thy voice, they are Thy sheep Thou speakest to them, they get good things, they say so, "Cause me to hear it".

Does not this show that religion must be a personal matter? It must be so. If you are a living sheep and if you are dwelling in the gardens you will want to hear the voice of the Shepherd, "My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me". Can you come in here, some of you? It may be that you would have to say, Well, I do not know whether I ask right or pray right or whether I pray at all, I am all confusion. Yes; but it does not matter how much confusion you may feel to have, the Lord can speak right into all the confusion, and it is a wonderful voice when He does. You remember when Elijah was on the mount God appeared to him there and demonstrated His power and majesty in the convulsions of nature so that there was a whirlwind and an earthquake and a fire burning things up, but after all that a still small voice. And yet how effective that was, it brought Elijah to the mouth of the cave with his face wrapped in his mantle. I do not know whether you have ever been there but it is a wonderful place to be in. Oh, the power of that voice will humble you; you will, so to speak, wrap your face in your mantle before the Lord. "The companions hearken to Thy voice". Well, it is a good thing they do, is not it? If some of you do not feel that you do just now it is a good thing that they do, because it means that the Lord does come into His gardens and feed His flock. Yes, you say, but I seem to be like one of those that have turned aside as we read in the first chapter. "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Yes, and yet you see there was a real love to the Lord there, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside", as though a sheep on the

other side of the hedge can see her companions feeding and would say, "Oh, why should I be like one not noticed, one left desolate, one passed by?" Do you feel to be like that? Are you indifferent hard about it, or is it thus, "Cause me to hear it?" You see sometimes when the Lord does speak to His sheep, even if it may not be to you, when you hear about that, in your heart you say "O such a one is a favoured character; Lord Thou hast been into the garden and spoken to this or that one; they hearken to Thy voice; cause me to hear it." Well, what do you want the Lord to say to you, some of you, then? "Cause me to hear it". O say you if only He would speak to my sin burdened heart and say "Thy sins are forgiven thee" that would be everything to me. Well keep just there, keep asking, keep asking like this, "Cause me to hear it". Press it on Him. Why you know all the time He is like Joseph who for a while did not make himself known to his brethren; but the time came that he could no longer refrain; and there always seems to be something sweet about that, he could no longer refrain; so he put all the rest out except his own brethren and made himself known to them and they wept together. So will you when He comes to this one dwelling in the garden. And He does come now and again and speak a word even to those who dwell in the gardens. This is the language of a live soul mourning over the Lord's silence, like David when he said, "Be not silent to me: lest, if thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit". "Cause me to hear Thy voice, speak Lord, O speak to me.

Do you really long to hear the Shepherd's voice? Have you got an aching void in your heart for something the world can never fill? O then may the Lord keep you waiting upon Him. Some of you have heard His voice many times, I believe I have heard His voice two or three times. Even so we all come to this place, "Cause me to hear it", do we not? If we are really anxious and lively, we are all in this place, "Cause me to hear it" and you will not get above that, in a sense, because if the Lord does

drop a word in your heart to help you, you will want to hear the same voice again. Yes, and when He comes again you will say, I know that voice, I have heard it before, I know that voice by its effect in my heart. "Cause me to hear it". Perhaps one dwelling in the garden here may long to hear His voice in direction in some way, another in confirmation, another in a promise; another may need it in reproof; but the Lord knows just how and when to speak. It may be perhaps that you are fainting and ready to die. His voice like a tender whisper may be heard in the ear of your heart saying "Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". Oh, if the Lord causes you to hear that voice it will fill you with love. Oh the wonder that He should love a sinner and should speak to poor, unworthy nothings. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it". Amen.