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## The Altogether Lovely

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 3rd February 1988

“His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely.” Song of Solomon 5:16

What a very high opinion and estimation the bride of Christ had of her best Beloved, as is recorded in this wonderful Book of mutual love and communion between Christ and the Church and the Church and Christ. His estimation of her, and hers of him, as set forth, is that which is found in some measure in the heart of every one who is taught of the Spirit even to this day.

*Sinners are high in his esteem,  
And sinners highly value him.*

(Gadsby's 89)

She had but a very low, an exceedingly low opinion of herself, for she calls herself black and uncomely, but she cannot find words sufficient to set forth the beauty, loveliness, attractiveness and glory of Christ. Truly the substance of some of the things expressed is the same as that which is spoken of by the hymn writer:

*Compared with Christ, in all beside  
No comeliness I see;  
The one thing needful, dearest Lord,  
Is to be one with thee.*

(Gadsby's 940)

Well, it is an infinite mercy if the Holy Spirit by his gracious teaching and effectual revelation has made the discovery of those two things to us—our need and Christ's sufficiency—and if this blessed person should be revealed to us personally and the glorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ should shine more and more gloriously in the eye of faith, as that is revealed in all its blessed sufficiency and suitability to meet our case. As we may try to notice more closely presently, there are no two persons so suitable to each other, there are no two characters who can walk in such close and sweet communion and love together, as Christ and a sensible and saved sinner—a sinner who is truly and really brought to know and feel their want, and to see, in this blessed person, everything that can fit and suit and abundantly satisfy that need. A felt need of salvation is the reason for an earnest and longing desire after him before there is a possession of him.

So great is the attraction, loveliness and desirability of Christ that there is none to be compared to him, both in the want of him and in the possession of him. This very matter is set before us in the Word of God as being a standard by which we may calculate our state and standing, and the present condition and health of the soul. The reality of the possession of a work of grace in the soul is proved by the one point: What think ye of Christ? Who is he? Whose Son is he?

It is a question that the Lord Jesus Christ himself asked: “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” There were many opinions, there were many things that were spoken in regard to this person who is the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely one to the Church of God and to the Church of God only. Some said one thing and some said another, but Jesus said, “But whom say ye that I am?” What is *your* opinion of me? What are *your* thoughts concerning me? “Whom say ye that I am?” A straight, searching, separating, discriminating and sanctifying question! Well, my friends, what response can we give in our hearts to this? Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

“He is despised and rejected of men ... He was despised and we esteemed him not.” (Isaiah 53:3) Indeed, yes, it is solemnly true that until and unless the Spirit quickens us into divine life, gives us grace,

opens our blind eyes, gives us to know our need of salvation, we shall despise him, we shall think him nothing worth. But has God the Spirit been pleased to make him something very different to us now than he was at one time? So that we see in him what the church saw in him, that is everything that is attractive, such a sweet disposition, such a glorious and blessed person in every consideration of his character, his offices and his blessed work, so that she cannot find words sufficient to set him forth as he is worthy to be set forth? The chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely one.

The Psalmist felt the same, for he said: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." (Psalm 94:9) There was none to be compared to Christ, this blessed person. I believe this is indeed one part of the description of what it is to be a real Christian. A real Christian is to be a partaker of Christ, to have union to him and to know what it is to enjoy, in our measure, some close, sacred and sweet communion with him.

I will attempt to look at the latter part of our text first and the former part later wherein we have set before us the communion which goes on between Christ and his church: 'His mouth is most sweet.'

1. We will look *first* at this word of the Church, 'He is altogether lovely.' If our religion is a right one, being truly of the Holy Spirit, if we form a part of the Church of God and make up that people who are his Bride, surely it must be concluded, safely concluded, that our feelings will be the same in our measure. Though we may feel to come very, very short in regard to it, yet there must be some likeness, surely. There must be some compatibility between our feelings and those expressed by the Church of God if we truly belong to it. There will be times indeed when it is impossible for us to set forth sufficiently what we see in regard to this blessed person.

*Living tongues are dumb at best;  
We must die to speak of Christ.*

(Gadsby's 177)

O what a wonderful thing if that verse should be true of us!

*But when this lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then, in a nobler, sweeter song,  
I'll sing thy power to save.*

(Gadsby's 160)

Let us look a little at what the Church saw in her Beloved. She uses figurative language to set forth his beauty and glory, and concludes, truly and rightly, that there is everything good and nothing bad; just simply nothing whatsoever to mar or spoil his altogether lovely person and disposition. 'He is altogether lovely.' There is not a single thing to mar him or to spoil him in regard to every part and particle of his thoughts and words, ways and character and everything that he had to communicate to her heart and do for her in the purposes of his grace. 'He is altogether lovely.'

Consider him in comparison to all other things. Where can we find anything apart from this blessed person, anywhere, that is not marred, spoiled, ruined, that has not its deficiencies, its deformities, its faults and failings? Everything is spoiled and marred. The best of creatures are but creatures at best. "The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." (Micah 7:4) There is none that are good or perfect among the whole of the fallen race of men and women: but here is one who is altogether lovely.

It is a wonderful mercy if he be endeared to our hearts and if the Holy Spirit causes him to be more and more needful in the feelings, more and more attractive, sufficient, and suitable in the realisation of his glory, as we may comprehend the glory of Christ. It is the very trials, temptations and a sense of our own state and condition in the world, our circumstances and heart feelings, which may be sanctified to this end. I suppose that none have spoken more highly or enlarged more sweetly upon the beauty, sweetness and loveliness of Christ than good Rutherford. And where did he taste the sweetness, where did he see the glory, where did he behold his worth, where was it that Christ was made everything to him and became to him such a glorious and altogether lovely person? Why, in the prison house! The prison which was turned into such a heavenly spot that he calls that prison Christ's palace. O, how much close, sacred, sweet and blessed communion Rutherford enjoyed in that prison cell with his best Beloved! It was heaven

to him! Why? Because he had Christ. Therefore he had happiness, therefore he had heaven, therefore he had joy and peace, and everything that he could have really. What is anything without Christ? Christ is everything without anything else. Here is the fullness, it is all in him. Nothing can make us really happy; nothing can make us really blessed, nothing can satisfy, without him. He is the altogether lovely one.

We must look very, very briefly at some of the things which constitute him to be so lovely, so altogether lovely. First, in his divine person. This is his infinite sufficiency to be to us poor sinners all that we need for time and eternity. Who is he? A question, maybe often asked, but so vitally important and so little really believed, comprehended, understood and enjoyed. Who is he? He is the Son of God, God the Son, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the very essence of all that is glorious, holy, righteous and good, the very essence of kindness, love, greatness and glory, and that to the infinite perfection of it. Here is no limit. O, the loveliness of the person of Christ as God's eternal Son! His glory cannot possibly, and never will be, comprehended by us. We are but poor, fickle, feeble, finite creatures and he is the infinite God who is glorious, perfect, and lovely beyond comprehension and understanding. The eternal, almighty, gracious faithful, kind and glorious Son of God is an all-sufficient friend and saviour.

But what is it that makes him so suitable? Why, the altogether lovely human nature of the Son of God. He became incarnate and he is lovely in that condescension and adorable nature—beautiful in it. He took upon himself our nature, without sin. It was holy, harmless, undefiled; the essence of pity, compassion, condescension, humility, meekness and the fullness of communicable grace and mercy; altogether lovely. O, the intrinsic glory of the person of Christ in his human nature united with the glory of his person! He has two natures, distinguishable natures, that are perfect—divine and human—but they are united in one blessed person to make this Jesus. He is lovely, attractive and wonderful beyond knowledge and understanding, but he may be known. My friends, I am sure if we know him and are blessed and favoured to be brought to the knowledge of him, we shall love him, adore him, worship him, admire him and, at the same time, we shall do as the Church did and lay ourselves very low, loathe ourselves, and abhor ourselves. These two things go so sweetly together. The more we adore him, the more we shall abhor ourselves; the more we love him, the more we shall loathe ourselves; the more he is endeared to us, the more we shall be ashamed of ourselves. The Church said, "I am black," Christ said, "Thou art comely," she said he was beautiful, perfect and lovely.

Now, a little further. 'He is altogether lovely.' Lovely in his glorious work for sinners. How admirable, how altogether lovely he is in his life, suffering temptation for his people that he might be a compassionate High Priest, fulfilling perfectly the holy law for them that he might bring in a suitable, everlasting righteousness to be imputed to them! How lovely and adorable he is in the whole of his conduct in his sojourn here below toward his disciples, toward the world and toward false professors! How lovely in his wisdom in his condescension and in his conduct; how tender! How kind, how gracious, how sympathetic, how pitying, how pitiful! Why, there is everything to admire in regard to all that he suffered and did in his holy life and substitutionary work. There is nothing to spoil him. 'He is altogether lovely.' O, the sweetness of his disposition, the sweetness of his words, the wonder of his mercy, the blessedness of his knowledge and understanding! 'He is altogether lovely!'

How lovely he is in his death, his awful death, a substitutionary death which he died for sinners! O, that one glorious sacrifice, that wonderful ablation that was offered upon the ignominious tree! How can we possibly understand or set forth the glory and wonder and loveliness of the substitutionary death of Christ?

And moreover, his willingness to die, his delight in suffering for his people. O, the loveliness of the love that was manifest! This indeed is the pledge and the measure of divine love. What a wonderful mercy if we see the beauty of it for ourselves: the loveliness of Christ, the Son of God, in his dying willingly for sinners. It is a blessed truth, O, that we might be given to realise it more sweetly, deeply and personally.

*What he endured no tongue can tell,  
To save our souls from death and hell.*

*(Gadsby's 403)*

But the altogether loveliness of Christ is also in his blessed offices. O, his glory as the High Priest of the Church! He, being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, always kind, always sympathetic, never

unkind, never a harsh word, never an unkind dealing, altogether lovely and exceedingly sweet in every part of his blessed work in fulfilling the suitable office of High Priest. Then he is altogether lovely as the Good Shepherd, as a never failing and ever present friend, and above and beyond all in the closest, sweetest and most blessed relationship of the husband to the Church. This is so sacred, so holy, so blessed and so close, but also absolutely vital. My friends, that is a big question—Have I union to the Church's living Head? What if we have not? A solemn question! But how blessed if we have and if Christ is pleased to attract and draw and allure our poor hearts to himself by the manifestation of his love in his sufficiency and suitability. For only as we are drawn can we go forth unto him; only as we are drawn are we found venturing to his footstool; only as we are drawn are we found coming to him. What a wonderful thing when our hearts are attracted by his love in the peculiar and sweet sense of it and our desperate need of him!

*What a precious, needful thing,  
Is the Lord and Saviour!*

(Gadsby's 574)

Without him we must perish, but if he is ours we shall be saved with an everlasting salvation.

How altogether lovely in his person and in his disposition is Christ in his close, sweet and blessed relationships to the Church. There have never been two persons anywhere, at any time, that have got on so well together as Christ and the sinner, a sinner and Christ. They are exactly suited to one another—I mean a sensible sinner. We often talk about Christ being a suitable Saviour for sinners, but O, it is a great thing to find a suitable sinner for the Saviour, that is, in a sensibly suitable condition for him. What is it that will cause him to become more and more attractive to us in our hearts' feelings but that needful and sweet teaching of the Holy Spirit in an ever deepening discovery of our need of Christ? There is the initial work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart which, being accompanied with light and life and understanding, will cause us to see those two things—our want and his sufficiency: our sin and his sin-atonement blood, our unrighteousness and his sufficient and imputable righteousness. So there will be that view of him, maybe at a distance at first, yea, maybe far off, but nevertheless a blessed glimpse of Christ in all his loveliness, sufficiency and suitability, so that the heart goes out after him.

*Jesus, Lover of my soul,  
Let me to thy bosom fly.*

(Gadsby's 303)

*Let the water and the blood,  
From thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

(Gadsby's 143)

Of this I am sure, if there is a beginning the Holy Spirit will continue. He will never leave nor forsake his own work in the soul—and the purpose and the end of the Spirit's work, yea, the glory of it, is just this: to exalt Christ in a sinner's heart. That is the purpose of the work of the Spirit. He does not speak of himself, he speaks of Christ and he reveals Christ to the soul and he will do, more and more, and over and over again. It is a good thing if we are so growing in grace that Christ is more needful to us, feelingly, now than ever. If we begin to see, though dimly perhaps to our feelings, just a little more of the wonder and glory of the person of Christ, which is an inexhaustible subject, and if he is becoming a little more dear, needful, attractive and lovely to our hearts' feelings, then our desires and cries become more and more urgent.

*Give me Christ, or else I die!*

(Gadsby's 737)

*Less than thyself will not suffice  
My comfort to restore.*

(Gadsby's 940)

Let me just ask the question, before going a little further. My friends, can we humbly appeal unto him, out of the felt desire of our hearts and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" (John 21:17) There is that deep down in my heart that goes out in longing desire, earnest desire after thy visitations, after a manifestation of thyself. 'I love thee in the want of thee.' How blessed if we can say it! "We love him, because he first loved us," (1 John 4:19) are the words of God, not the words of man. Love to him and an attraction to him is the effect and not the cause of our interest in him, it is his favour toward us. Well, the Church here exclaimed in regard to his beauty, "My beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand . . . yea, the altogether lovely." (v. 10)

2. We will now look at the former part of our text. This is closely connected with that which we have attempted to notice and contains the sweet conclusion in regard to that vital part of experience—communion with Christ. His mouth, the words of his mouth, the kisses of his mouth: 'His mouth is most sweet.'

O, the sweet, needful, personal, close, intimate communion of the soul with Christ. This is the very substance, the very life of real religion—that which goes on between the soul and Jesus, Jesus and the soul. He speaks; the heart responds. There are many ways in which he is pleased to communicate; not necessarily, and not only, by direct words that are spoken with power and influence to the heart, but also the many ways in which he is pleased to manifest himself to the soul. His voice is to be heard. He is always speaking, had we ears to hear and hearts to understand, but alas, we are dull of hearing, very dull of hearing. O that the Holy Spirit might be pleased so to affect our hearts as to cause us to be attentive. As the hymn writer says: "Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee!" (*Gadsby's* 968)

What a wonderful mercy if he does speak from time to time and we find that 'His mouth is most sweet' in both aspects of the subject—the words that he speaks, the gracious words that proceed from his lips as they were declared while here below, and the kisses of his mouth, those sure, felt, certain, blessed and comfortable tokens of his love, the feeling of his love. O! do we know what it is to long sometimes for another kiss and that he would assure us of his love? That he would give us another sweet token, make us feel it, and cause our hearts to respond to it in love in return, 'His mouth is most sweet.' "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." (Solomon's Song 1:2) May I ask the question—when did we feel that we last received such a token of his love to our poor soul, a kiss, that which we felt? It communicated to our souls the power and sweetness and confidence, the blessed fact that he has loved us and, having loved us, will love us to the end.

But now there is the sweetness of his mouth: 'His mouth is most sweet,' in the communication of his mind, his will and his thoughts toward us. In this there are two things I want to very briefly notice. 'His mouth is most sweet' in regard to his words to the soul as a blessed Mediator, also his words that are spoken for and on the account of his bride, in his ever prevailing, most sweet and blessed intercession at the right hand of God. Let us look a little at those two things using an illustration. Sometimes when a person is in dire need, has a difficult case, has an alarming and most dreadful matter to burden and oppress him, there may be recommended a person who is able and willing to grant assistance. The person who recommends that wealthy and able character may say, 'Now you take your case to that person and when you go, mention my name, tell him I sent you.' This is just exactly what Jesus says to his burdened people. He says, 'Mention my name, tell the Father I sent you, ask in my name, and ye shall receive.' Now, how sweet those words are to a poor needy sinner, one who feels himself so totally unworthy and hell deserving, has such an awful case, such a dreadful condition, and Jesus says as the Mediator, 'Mention my name!' If you and I are enabled to mention the name of Jesus at the footstool of mercy, and mention that name believingly, and plead, and in truth say, 'For Christ's sake,' that will prevail.

*I can no denial take,  
When I plead for Jesus' sake.*

(*Gadsby's* 376)

O, how sweet those words when spoken to the soul! 'Mention my name.' "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive." (John 14:24)

Now, how sweet is his mouth. 'His mouth is most sweet' in the intercession which he himself exercises as the interceding advocate at God's right hand. The substance of this is contained in the 17th

chapter of John's Gospel—and how sweet the words are if we are given to feel an interest in them. There is no doubt whatsoever but that those petitions of Christ will be granted. A wonderful thing if we are included in those words: 'I pray for them.' (v.9) O, my friends, if Jesus prays for us it must be well. His petition is heard.

*But with authority he asks,  
Enthroned in glory now.  
For all that come to God by him,  
Salvation he demands.*

(Gadsby's 117)

Yes, he points to, and shows the evidences of his meritorious sufferings, pleads what he has done for poor sinners, and the Father hears and will answer. "His mouth is most sweet."

Now let us consider the words he speaks to his people as the sweet and blessed friend of sinners, as that blessed Saviour, who is full of love and pity, mercy, tenderness and compassion. There are a number of ways in which he is pleased to speak. 'His mouth is most sweet.'

O, how sweet when he speaks in a way of gracious and kind invitation: 'Come!' Ah, it may be that he has spoken but one word to us at times—and that is a wonderful thing; just one word, 'Come!' Where is there one anywhere who may forbid such a character to venture to Christ just as they are? Our suitability to come to him for help, what is it? Sensible and felt hardness, coldness, death, guilt, condemnation, ruin, darkness, temptation—that is our fitness. You cannot come too filthy, you cannot come too bad, you cannot come too wretched: this is the very experienced fitness to come to him. The more cold, the more wretched, the more unfeeling, the more prayerless—the more fit to come.

*All the fitness he requireth  
Is to feel your need of him.*

(Gadsby's 723)

It is for these characters that he came into the world, and it is to them that he extends an unreserved and blessed and unconditional invitation, 'Come!' Now, how sweet his mouth when he thus speaks!

How sweet his mouth when he speaks, 'Fear not,' with gracious and divine power. A number of times thus he spoke to his disciples in their distresses, in their danger, in their difficulties, in their fears, he said, 'Fear not.' How sweet it is when he speaks a word of comfort, pardon and peace into the soul. How sweet was his mouth to such characters as Mary, the Syrophenician woman, the dying thief, the leper, the impotent man and so many others that we read of in the Gospels. O, what sweet, gracious words proceeded from his lips! There is no doubt but that those who received these blessed things could truly say from experience, 'His mouth is most sweet.'

Finally, we may stand in need of counsel, direction, and help, deeply in need of it. We may wait a long time not knowing what to do or what way to take or what is the right thing to do. After much prayer and waiting and longing and suing and begging, he will hear our cry and grant a word of counsel and direction. O, when he is pleased to speak by circumstances, by a word, by the influence of his good Spirit, how sweet it is! "Go on; Lo! here's the way." (Gadsby's 812) Now if he speaks, power must accompany it. O, the waiting characters! They that wait upon Christ to hear his voice will not presume, they will not take words to themselves, nay, they will wait for him to speak mightily and powerfully in their hearts, and how sweet that is. May we know his voice, may communion much increase, may there be many things going on between our souls and Christ in secret. O, may he be pleased to endear himself to our souls more and more and fulfil that desire sometimes expressed:

*Lord Jesus, make thyself to me  
A living, bright reality.*

(Charlotte Elliott)

Not to know about him, but to know him, to become more and more acquainted with him. You know, it is a common expression among men, you must live with a person to know them. To live with Christ, to walk with Christ, to commune with Christ will bring us to a knowledge of him, and I am sure that the more that we know of him the more we shall be brought to whole-heartedly agree with the Church: 'He is altogether lovely.' We shall never find a fault in him, we shall never find anything to mar

his sweet disposition, and we shall never find anything to grieve us in regard to the words that proceed out of his blessed lips. O, 'He is altogether lovely!'

Well, may we be caused and enabled truly to adore him and to worship him in truth and in deed. He is worthy of our highest praise, as the hymn writer says:

*Let all the ransomed of the Lord  
Exalt his love with one accord,  
And hallelujah sing:  
Adore the dying friend of man,  
And bless him highly as you can;  
He is your God and King.*

(Gadsby's 149)

The Lord add his blessing.  
Amen.

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