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Leaning Upon the Beloved

Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 3rd January 1986

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?”
Song of Solomon 8:5

We have a great question asked which we will attempt first to briefly answer—who the person is. Then we will notice that this one is said to be ‘coming up from the wilderness.’ It is a most needful and blessed separation, and this same character is leaning upon her beloved. Blessed union, blessed communion, wonderful attachment, gracious, sweet and safe experience!

First then to notice a little of the person: ‘who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?’ Well, it is the Church of God, the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, and every character that makes up that church and that spouse of the best Beloved. It is that number of people with whom the Lord Jesus Christ has been pleased to enter into a precious and most blessed and eternal and covenant union; to every one of whom, in due time and in due season that sacred union shall be in some measure blessedly revealed, made known and experienced. So that those persons who are spoken of in this portion of God’s Word are such, in the experience of it, who have known the quickening power of God the Holy Spirit and who have been brought to know something of their need of Christ as their Redeemer and their Saviour. It is those who have been shown and caused to know something of their lost, ruined, hopeless and helpless condition in and of themselves. For to whom is Christ endeared, to whom is he precious, and to whom is he needful but unto those who know something of their own sinnership and their lost, ruined, hopeless and undone condition?

Now it is on account of two things that this person is found in this experience, ‘coming up from the wilderness and leaning upon her beloved.’ The first is that separating teaching and influence of God the Holy Spirit which will cause this one truly to come up from the wilderness; and the second is that by that initial and loving desire in the heart she may be enabled indeed to lean wholly and simply upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone for all those things that she is taught her need of, both in the first instance as well as throughout her experience, in this present time state. As every one of these characters moves along toward that blessed inheritance which is promised to them, they will find the necessity and be increasingly sensible of their felt dependence. They will find they need to lean more and more upon this one and only precious Saviour, who can hold them, strengthen them, help them, preserve them, save them, deliver them and bring them safely through.

First, we will notice just a little what this coming up from the wilderness is. There are two phases or parts of this which I will briefly notice. The first is the coming up from the wilderness of Sinai, which is the wilderness spoken of earlier in the book by this precious beloved of the church: “Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.” (Song of Solomon 2:10) This is the voice of Christ to the seeking soul. It is the voice of Christ to the travelling one who is in the wilderness and in distress, “Rise up ... and come away.” ‘Come away from this wilderness condition and state, come away with me, and come away to me.’

Now, everyone who is truly taught of the Holy Spirit and quickened by the Holy Ghost will be brought to solemnly realise and know that there is no help, no hope, no comfort, no strength, no salvation, no justification, and no heaven to be found at Sinai’s awful mount. That place which is indicative of the giving of God’s holy, just and righteous law, is that place where sin is caused to abound. There is no place of repentance there; there is no vestige of hope there. Why, all that Sinai can say is ‘Do or die.’ It says that everyone who transgresses shall be punished eternally. There cannot be the least degree of rest or peace in such a place as this. Yet, my friends, how it is the nature of every man and woman to hang about that place. It is natural to us, we have a legal spirit and it is our nature to hang around that solemn mount. Nevertheless all it can do is to pronounce death; all it can do is to pronounce

the curse; all it can do is to pronounce judgment; all it can do is to threaten us with the penal thing that is due to our sin—nothing but death.

There is a coming up from this wilderness, for the souls that are well taught the abounding of their sin and the just deserts of their sins and of their transgressions will see a beauty in Jesus Christ. He will become very dear, and very needful, and very attractive, and very blessed, and very beloved in the need of him. So the soul who comes up from this wilderness comes away from all legal strivings, all their labour, fears, guilt, death and all of the solemn pronouncements of Sinai. "Come away to me!"

As I have quoted more than once to you, those words indeed were both searching as well as encouraging to me in my spiritual youth, when I trust I was truly seeking after God's salvation:

*Who but the soul that's led to know
How just and holy is the law,
Will to the cross of Christ repair,
And seek salvation only there?*

(Gadsby's 113)

They will, they will seek salvation only there. Now I do believe there are a number of you who do know how just and holy God's law is, not only by reading about it, but because you have felt it in your conscience. You know it is a just and holy law which can do nothing but condemn you and curse you for your sins. It cannot give you life, cannot bring you peace or rest, so you come up from that wilderness as attracted by Christ.

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

(Gadsby's 303)

That is the place where this soul desires, in deed and in truth, to rest, to lean, to trust—in Christ their best Beloved.

First there is this coming up from the wilderness, coming away, a coming away from all that. Then there is "Come unto me." What a sweet and precious invitation there is to this character: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29) Well, I am sure there is no real leaning upon Christ until we are driven out of every false refuge and brought out from every false hope, and delivered from every false trust.

But there is a coming up from the wilderness in another branch of it. Everyone who is born again of the Holy Spirit will find and prove that it is a wilderness below. There is nothing anywhere in all this world that can render to a living soul what they feel they must have. There can be no rest nor satisfaction found anywhere. These persons are just like that dove which Noah let go from the ark. She flew to and fro and could find no rest for the sole of her foot.

*No satisfying rest, earth's fluttering joys impart;
The portion of a beast will not content my heart;
The God of spirits only can fill up the vast desires of man.*

(Gadsby's 886)

So there is a coming out and at times particularly a most sweet, precious, blessed detachment from it all.

Now I want to look at this a little further for I do not wish to imply by my remarks that God's people are unappreciative or ungrateful for God's dealings in providence. Indeed they would be thankful for necessary food, necessary clothing, a comfortable home, the benefits and mercies that surround them. But what makes a wilderness to a new born soul? It is just like the wilderness that the Israelites were passing through—there was nothing, nothing at all to sustain them. It was a waste howling wilderness, nothing but a vast expanse of barren land. They must be sustained with something from heaven, they must have manna to eat and they must have water from the smitten rock. There was nothing in the wilderness that could sustain them, it was a wilderness, and so it is to God's people. There are one or two things in particular which make it so to them. The first and the greatest of all is—sin. It is a sinful world. Everything about us is that which conduces to barrenness, carnality, folly, sin, enmity. How utterly sick

sometimes a child of God does get of it all! All the filth and the sin within his own heart, his old nature and all about him—he would be free from it. He desires to come out of it, to be free from all its influence. What is there? What is there around us that is conducive to a spiritual mind? What is there to bring relief to a troubled soul? What is there to bring relief to a tempted soul? What is there to bring relief to one who is oppressed with self and sin? It is a wilderness to the new man.

That which also makes it a wilderness to the exercised child of God is all the trouble, affliction and distress that attend his steps. The oppression and the difficulties and the trials—he wants to come out of all this and lean upon his Beloved. It is a wilderness also on account of the vanity and emptiness of it all. Why, if you have got a real case; if you have got a soul exercise; if you are burdened with temptations and difficulties with regard to your never dying soul; if you are exercised and concerned about eternity, what is there in all this world that can bring any relief, comfort, strength, and endurance of any kind whatsoever? What is it all? It is a wilderness! God is not a wilderness to his people, but they can indeed and truly say that it is a wilderness without him—it is indeed.

*Dark and cheerless is the morn
Unaccompanied by thee.*

(Gadsby's 726)

To the true child of God, the character in our text, the bride of Christ—what is there to him without Christ? What is there anywhere without him? It is a wilderness, is it not? All empty, vain, and without the least comfort or relief.

This one in our text, she comes up out of the wilderness, comes away from Sinai, and comes away from the world. O what a wonderful thing, just now and again, really and feelingly to have our backs upon the world, to have it beneath our feet, and to be enabled to lean upon Christ in all that this sweetly means! This is a most sweet and most safe posture, for here is trust and communion. She comes up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved. Well, what a most sweet, precious, wonderful and blessed privilege this is! It is a great privilege for a poor sinner to be favoured and enabled to lean on Christ the Son of God, that precious and all-sufficient and glorious Saviour.

Now there are two things that I want to notice in this coming up from the wilderness and coming to lean upon this Beloved of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. For in the initial experience of the soul there is not that sufficiency of faith in the measure and exercise of it for the soul's comfort and feelings, to trust sweetly and wholly in Christ. They desire it—the desire of the living soul is to be enabled to lean in unreserved and sweet and comfortable trust wholly upon Christ, in all that he is, all that he has done and for everything they feel to need

But this is not only the first favoured experience of the soul, but thus they proceed. For this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved, sets before us a proceeding. There is a going on, leaning, and so moving on. There are two lines in a hymn which are very sweet concerning this one in our text:

*And on his bosom leans secure,
Whose temples bled for her.*

(Gadsby's 994)

A sweet posture, is it not? She leans secure, leans secure upon his breast, the breast of him whose temples bled for her, and so she safely moves along.

It is a most precious thing to be brought, as I believe God's people are brought through the exercise of their souls as well as the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to lean harder as they go on. I feel that it is a great point in experience to come to that place where we are sensibly and feelingly and totally dependent, and dependent by choice. That is an experience I covet, I wish I had attained to it. It is one thing to be brought through sheer necessity to have to depend for all, but my friends, to lean, to walk comfortably and sweetly in that pathway where dependence is our choice, is a blessed experience. It is safe and sweet to be utterly and completely dependent. Why, independence is hateful to God and it is a dangerous condition. It is most precious then, to be brought and to be kept in this posture, leaning upon the Beloved.

Well now, I want to look at a two of the many branches of this experience, that for which the soul is brought to trust in Christ and is brought to lean upon him. First we will notice the example of leaning upon the arm, and afterward, we will look a little at what it is to lean upon the breast. Both things are definite and clear experiences when they are given.

Now to lean upon the arm of Christ is to lean upon his power and his sufficiency. The wilderness of Sinai, as well as the wilderness of the world, as sanctified to us in its various aspects, will bring us to an end of all our own resources and strength and sufficiency in and of ourselves—and we do not and cannot really wholly depend until we are emptied, until we have nothing of our own. It is painful to the flesh, but profitable, and it is only as we are brought to lean upon the strong and almighty arm of Christ that we have any real strength, that we have any true sufficiency. It is a profitable experience. Painful to be emptied, but when we are brought to it at last, it is a wonderful thing to fall upon him, cast ourselves upon him, sink or swim, lost or saved, in humble trust, leaning upon his almighty arm as he is the almighty Saviour, and abundantly sufficient to uphold us, to deliver us and support us. This is coming up leaning, leaning upon the arm of the Beloved. Do we know anything of what it is thus to lean hard on Christ? If we do, my friends, I am sure that he will never, never fail us. He will not let us down, he will not prove unfaithful to us if we can trust him. There is a point about this trust, and this leaning, which is important, for if we do not trust him for all, we trust him for nothing. It is whole trust or no trust. For if we trust him for this and not for that, what kind of trust is it? O to lean on him and to trust him for everything! Blessed are the souls that come leaning upon their Beloved, trusting in him for righteousness, not partly but wholly.

O to lean upon him in his all-sufficient obedience! What a sweet thing this is. If we have been brought once to do this in the earlier part of our experience and so to lean upon him for righteousness, how can we proceed, how can we go on apart from still leaning hard upon him for it? No soul ever did start in the righteousness of Christ and proceeded in their own; no, never. It is his righteousness all the way. This coming up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved will be a trusting in him for righteousness and strength. As one of old declared, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." (Isaiah 45:24) Spiritual strength principally, for those words are proved continually by God's people—"Without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5) We cannot keep him in our sight, we cannot think a thought aright, we cannot pray, we cannot believe, we cannot trust, we cannot repent, we cannot obey, and we can do no good apart from leaning upon Christ for strength.

Now this strong arm of his is for weaklings, for those who are faint. It is for those who are tried and tempted who lean the hardest. It is to lean upon him for righteousness and strength, lean on him for justification. Yes, to trust wholly in his merits. O what a point in experience this is—

*If ever my poor soul be saved,
'Tis Christ must be the way!*

(Gadsby's 678)

My friends, I trust some of you can say that honestly—that we do feel it, don't we? None other: he, and he alone is our trust for salvation. We know no other merits but his; when we get there we are right.

*When we live on Jesus' merit,
Then we worship God aright,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Then we savingly unite.*

(Gadsby's 180)

That is to lean on him; trusting sensibly and feelingly in his merit, having none of our own, none whatever, not an atom, not a scrap, no good deeds to plead, no righteousness at all. O to lean on him! There is also trusting in him or leaning upon his arm, his power, for perseverance in our race.

*Perseverance in our race,
We draw from Jesus' blood.*

(Gadsby's 796)

Ah, that is the source of this enduring. How can we endure without leaning upon him? Why, what would happen to us if we were to attempt one step in our own strength? One step on our own—we should fall to rise no more. But O to lean upon the Beloved!

We also trust in him or lean upon him for the power and efficacy of his atonement—and what a power and what an efficacy there is here—the pardon of our sin. O that precious sin-atonement blood, the glory of the atonement! I wish that I could preach it as it is worthy to be preached, the power of it, the power of the cross. Guilty sinners, poor guilty sinners, law condemned sinners, those who flee from Sinai, those who come up from the wilderness of Sinai, those who come up out of the wilderness of the world, and sin, and sorrow, and temptation, and trouble, and seek peace and rest and pardon and sanctification in the precious blood of Christ—lean on him for it! O it is to lean upon his almighty arm and it is to trust in him for deliverance from our fears, death, destruction, Satan’s temptations and power and from all those things which oppress. This is a precious experience and sweet to walk in. How precious it is to be enabled, as the hymn writer says:

*Vents in his bosom all her woes,
And leaning moves along.*

(Gadsby’s 994)

There is a liberty to do this, a sweet liberty. The soul is welcome so to pour out their sorrows and their woes. There is not a single word in the whole Scripture that is spoken against or gives the slightest discouragement whatsoever to a sensible sinner. You who feel your sins may think these things are all against you. Those of you who mourn and lament and sorrow and grieve on account of what you say, do and think, you conclude that everything is against you. But God’s Word is not against you. There is every encouragement in the Scriptures to sinners who are sensible of their need. These are they who are welcome to come and lean on Christ in humble dependence, and it is to them that he is the Beloved, and he becomes more and more precious to their souls. I hope he may become more and more precious to our souls. If we are growing in grace, if we are growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, he will become more and more needful, more and more precious, more and more necessary to us.

What a precious thing to lean upon him, to have such a blessed persuasion of our interest, under the teaching and revelation of the Holy Spirit and the feeling of our own insufficiency, to be enabled to trust him as he is worthy to be trusted, to lean upon him as he is worthy to be leaned on. O how happy we should be if we could really trust in Christ, if we could really lean on him! What a great blessing if we are enabled to do so! ‘Leaning upon her beloved.’

Just one question before we pass to our next point. My friends, does he make himself more needful to us, does he become more endeared to our hearts, can we really say, ‘I without him perish must.’? He is the one thing needful! It is often our prayer that we may be enabled really to trust him in the midst of all our woes, afflictions, temptations, trials, sins and guilt, in our wretched condition in and of ourselves. O to lean upon him!

Now the next point is that of leaning upon his breast. What are we to understand by this as an illustration of experience? What is set forth by this breast of Christ? It is his love. O what a deep, what an inexhaustible subject is the love of Christ! Who does he love and whom has he loved but sinners, sensible sinners? “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.” (Luke 15:2) He loved them so much that he gave himself for them. He came down from the glories of heaven and took upon him our nature and sorrowed and grieved and mourned and sweat and bled and died for sinners, because he loved them.

Now that love is immutable; it is eternal; it is free, sovereign and unspeakable; it is incomprehensible and it is love beyond degree. Now what a blessed thing it is to trust in that love! O what a wonderful thing if we have a token of it in our poor hearts, if that love has ever been impressed upon our hearts, if we have ever felt a little of that sacred power, sweetness and warmth of it! I am sure if we have ever felt that love we have found sweet rest in it. We have figuratively, laid our head upon the bosom of Christ, as blessed John did literally, and we have rested in that love. What a wonder then, if we are enabled to say, ‘I believe he loved me.’ Now if we lean on that, we trust in that love, love which can never, never fail and which will ever do the best for us. I am sure that souls who trust in that love, if given to feel it at any season in experience, first or last, will prove that it is that which will detach from everything else and

bring us sweetly to lean upon Jesus Christ. Because of his love there will be sweet dependence. Why, this will bring us sweetly away from Sinai and all forbidden care and toil and labour and striving. It will bring us away from the world. There will be a sweet detachment and we shall be attracted to Christ by this precious, uniting love. O to lean on it truly at all times. How favoured we should be if we could do so! 'Leaning upon her beloved.'

How very sacred, how very sanctifying, how very humbling it is if ever Christ suffers you or me to feelingly lay our head upon his bosom. We shall think we are honoured indeed. May this be our case increasingly. As we go on may we answer to this description: 'this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved.' Leaning upon the almighty arm of his strength and upon the sweet and unchanging and unfathomable bosom of his eternal love, which is manifest by his cross, the measure and pledge of that love. Precious and sweet it is! This will satisfy the soul, will bring peace, will bring rest and will bring satisfaction—and what a precious and sacred way to proceed. I am sure there cannot possibly be two persons who suit one another better than Christ and a sinner, a sinner and Christ. If I may use the term reverently, they are perfectly matched, are they not? He is exactly suited to their condition and case and they are exactly suited to him as he is their almighty and precious Saviour.

Well, I want to look at this for a few minutes. 'Coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved.' There is the blessed aspect of the subject which is sweetly applicable with regard to all that concerns us in our providences. 'Leaning upon her beloved.' O my friends, do not try and lean on yourself! May I be kept from leaning upon myself! May we never lean on our own understanding—O to lean on Christ!—to lean on him totally and in complete dependence!

*The way I walk cannot be wrong,
If Jesus be but there.*

(Gadsby's 812)

There have been times and will be times when we shall be absolutely nonplussed, we shall be in a position where we do not know what to do. We shall be brought to the end of all our own wisdom, our own understanding, our own resources. Then what is our course?—to lean on him, that is our course. There is no other way, no safer way but to lean on the Beloved. Not to lean on an arm of flesh or an arm of someone else, not to seek that we may find some help or some direction or some counsel or some relief from a man or a woman or any counsellor, but O may we have the privilege of leaning on his bosom, telling him our case! Yes, the privilege of pouring it all out! He will listen, he will listen. He cares for his people. How sweet it is to be able to tell him our case, to tell him our circumstances, to pour it all out into his ear whose heart is full of sympathy, and tenderness and love, and in all those many, many changes which concern us, to lean upon his almighty arm.

Why, no doubt the exercised of God's people here, and everywhere, who are burdened with some exercise and concern in their pathway have got something that they cannot manage, and God will see to it you cannot manage it if you are his child. I have said God hates independence. We love it. You would love to be able to manage all your affairs. You would love to have strength to manage all your own matters, be independent and go on without so much exercise and so much prayer. But God will not have independence. Our flesh likes to be so independent. We do not like to be so emptied and so poor. But that is God's way with his people. Our flesh does not like to have to cry, to beg, beg, and beg. But God will have them to be dependent. What is this dependence? It is 'Leaning upon the beloved.' O when we know a little of his power and a little of his love, how sweet and precious it is to lean!

Now as we get older the way does not get easier. As we get older there is not more sunshine, is there? Days of darkness are many. Whatever your circumstances may be outwardly, things may be easier with you outside than ever before, you have never been so free from care, never been so comfortable in your circumstances as you are now, but it does not make the way easier, does it? Daily dependence! My friends, as we get older and temptations may increase, the way gets darker, our hearts seem to get more barren, our minds more carnal; we feel more deadness, emptiness and worldliness. What is our safe way? To lean utterly on Christ. He is sufficient. His salvation will be sufficient to bring us through. He is full of every grace. It is here it abounds and overflows freely for every needy soul. O what a mercy to be dependent, feelingly dependent—to lean, to lean hard—really to trust and not to fear!

Lean upon him then in regard to providence for daily strength, daily counsel, daily wisdom, and daily direction. He will undertake for us in everything, deliver and defend us from every foe and every fear, and grant to us safe conduct. How safe must be that soul who lives on Christ, who leans on him and walks in peace and sweet communion with him. And O, might this communion be greatly increased!

'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?' The Church of Christ! And that Church is made up of sinners, guilty sinners, sinners who are in and of themselves helpless, hopeless, lost, and utterly dependent, dependent upon Christ for all. O, but what a Beloved he is! How great his love, how great his grace, how great his sufficiency! May we prove him, may we trust him, may we lean hard upon him and he will bring us safely through.

The Lord add his blessing to these few thoughts.

Amen.

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