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SERMON

PREACHED BY MR L S B HYDE

AT

'SALEM' CHAPEL, CARSHALTON

Text  
Song of Solomon 5, verse 9

Sunday afternoon  
14th March 1982

What is thy beloved more than another beloved,  
O thou fairest among women?

There are many questions which have been put throughout the ages, but we may well consider this to be a question of paramount importance. Indeed, it is a question which will have a bearing upon where we shall spend eternity. If our answer is a right one and we are able to give a clear report concerning our Beloved, and the reason why Jesus Christ is loved above everything and everyone else, then it will be well. On the other hand, if we should dither and find that we cannot give a clear answer, then may this be the occasion when we shall be deeply concerned to give a clear answer in response to this important question: 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?'

First of all, we have to consider who this beloved is. We need to be specific so that we are all thinking about and speaking about the same person. As you know, this Song of Solomon is a record of the interchange of conversation between Christ and His body, the church, His bride. We cannot have anything more close or a relationship nearer. The Word of God speaks to us about the matrimonial joining together, and that is regarded as the closest thing on earth, never to be broken until death us do part. Significantly, the Apostle relates this to Christ when he says: But I speak concerning Christ and His church. So this is what we have before us in this principal of all the one thousand and five Songs that Solomon wrote. As this is the principal Song, so we may say that this is the principal question; and it is answered throughout this Song. 'What is thy beloved,' in other words, what is Jesus Christ, 'more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?'

It is true to say that the relationship between husband and wife should be and is extremely close, and one may feel disturbed if it should ever be suggested that a person could love another better than either husband or wife, as the

case may be. But the Lord Jesus Christ in His teaching brings this point forward - the importance and necessity of having a love to Him which supercedes the love of a husband to wife and wife to husband, or to father and mother, sister and brother, and so on. Furthermore, the emphasis is laid upon it in this way, that 'whosoever loveth these more than me, is not worthy of me.' And furthermore, 'cannot be my disciple.' This of course does not mean to say that if a person has love to Jesus Christ, then they must hate their husband or wife, or their father, sister, brother, mother, and so on; but there is a relative application. One of our good ministers of an earlier period was deeply concerned because he was afraid that he was setting his wife before God, in which case he would be idolizing her. This troubled him so much that he was afraid that God would deal with him very solemnly for having such affection for his wife which seemed to almost override the affection for God Himself. But he records that the Lord showed him that he could still love his wife and yet love Christ more; and that is the main point. However much we may love those that God has put into our heart, then we are required to love Christ more.

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' Another beloved has of necessity limitations. This is particularly so when we come to think of the way of salvation. The love to one another is exceedingly great, and there have been remarkable examples of the depth of love existing between husband and wife; how far they will go in an endeavour to save themselves from difficulties; they will associate them with themselves in defaming circumstances; and yet they are limited. We may have love, we may profess love, and yet not be able to do what that love wants to do. Just to set an illustration before you, there may be one in great suffering and we would have a fervent desire to relieve that person of their suffering, and yet we are incapable of so doing. Now that will not undermine our love, because we are not capable of doing that which we want to do. Love very often exhibits itself in desire when it is not capable of exhibiting itself in accomplishment. But God is able, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. I would make the point, however, that we shall not love our Lord Jesus Christ to the lessening of our love to those that God has put into our hearts. Indeed, if the matter of matrimony is in the Lord, then there will be a mutual desire that Christ should be set forth in all His glory at all times; each one will be willing to confess that Christ must be first, Christ must be last, and Christ must be all in all in their daily walk, life and conversation.

Now can this not be viewed as a great mystery? Amongst men there are many occasions when we cannot solve a mystery. We would come to think of this mystery of godliness, how a person, a sinner, fallen, depraved, should have power to love Christ, and that Christ should ever love him! It is an unsolved mystery, and it never will be solved this side of the grave.

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' Now what shall we have to say to this question this afternoon? Dr Watts sets before us some very important and precious views. We read in the verses that follow this question and see that the spouse has a very clear knowledge of Christ. Now this may trouble some of us. "O for a clearer knowledge of Christ, a deeper sense of the characteristics of His glory, and the depth of His love!" She says in reply: 'My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.' So you see how eminent He was. In our private devotions do we go and tell our Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ, how eminent He is, that He is above everyone else? I think sometimes we can be deficient in our prayers in this way, that we fail to tell Him what He is like to us and what He means to us. It is surely a good, profitable and pleasing occupation to begin our confessions, our prayers and our confessions, by telling the Lord how great and wonderful He is.

We find in the account of Hezekiah that Sennacherib sent him a letter. Having received the letter, Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. But when he began to pray, it seems as though the letter disappears, he just leaves it there, and then he begins to speak of how great the Lord is: 'O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.' So how good it is to make that clear, that God is great. Our Beloved is great, our Beloved is the chiefest among ten thousand, because He is able, 'He is willing, doubt no more,' to deal with those things which it is quite beyond us to deal with ourselves. So "my Beloved is more than another beloved because He excels in everything." The Apostle Paul was led to see this point very clearly, for he tells the church at Philippi that he counted 'all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.'

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' So this person who was being asked this question was the fairest among women. We may just pause here to notice what is said about her in the first chapter of this Song. We find her confessing her deficiencies: 'I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me.' How then comes it that this bride of Christ should be described in this verse as the fairest among women? 'Fair as the moon,' is another expression which is used in this same Song, 'fair as the moon . . . and terrible as an army with banners.' How do we regard this person who is asked this question, the fairest among women? Clothed with the righteousness of Christ, washed in the blood of Christ, she is

altogether lovely, altogether fair. We should remember that the bride of Christ, prepared, will be exactly the same as Christ Himself. He is altogether lovely, she is altogether lovely. Jeremiah tells us that 'this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' We read on a few chapters and we come to this: 'And this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.' The same name, the same Person. We read of Christ and His bride being one, that they become one and the same Person. Do you think you could become the same person as Christ? Well, in this union which is set forth in the marriage of the Lamb and His bride, they become one. The Word of God tells us that they become one flesh, and it isn't long before they realize there is this strange work being effected in them. Well, in marriage they may have to be moulded to one another, yet they become one more and more. How much more so with respect to the bride of Christ. When the Father looks upon the church, He does not look upon all their sin, but He looks upon them as accepted in the Beloved.

The bride, the spouse, we may rightly say must always stand by her husband, and he will always stand forward and first. However much this may be argued about with respect to natural things, it cannot be argued about with respect to Christ and His bride. The bride will always want Christ put forward, she will always be willing, so to speak, to stand just a little back and be obscured. It is even so with regard to the approach of the church in prayer unto God. It isn't that they come, as they sometimes feel they might come, as sinners before God, but they come in Christ. 'Tis He instead of me is seen,' not to the exclusion of me, but all the glory of Christ is seen, and all that glory of Christ is centred upon the bride; so that we become on equal terms. Does our faith rise up to this great and glorious truth that we are on equal terms? 'That worms of earth could ever be one with incarnate Deity.' You will find that this is a precious experience when you are one with the dear Son of God, feeling that you are accepted in the Beloved. This union with Christ is so extremely close that it is referred to as a walking in Christ, and a sitting together in heavenly places in Christ; and that is just how it is.

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' A new eyesight has been given, a new hearing has been bestowed upon that person who is born again of the Spirit, born of God; he has an eye for Christ. There was a time when we had no eye for Christ. Perhaps some of us can remember it, when we had no eye for Christ and no hearing for Christ's words. What is the position today? Have we an eye for Christ? You may say: "Well, how shall I know whether I have an eye for Christ?" Perhaps I can do no better than refer you to Dr Watts' words, when he said: 'The more thy glories strike my eyes, the humbler

I shall lie.' By that measure you may well consider as to whether you have ever seen Christ, because if you have seen Christ then you must love Christ. 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' Well, He is supreme in everything; grace is poured into His lips, the words that He speaks are so suitable. It has been expressed that His visage is so beautiful to look upon. We may have looked upon that face in the way described by Isaiah, and seen that His visage was more marred than any man's, but we may well take the point that as we behold Christ He is beautiful at any time, under all conditions. You know, when we love a person after the flesh, that love is not affected by a changed condition in that person. Whether the person be in health or in sickness, yet the love is just the same. Whether there be poverty or prosperity, where there is true love it is just the same. Whether there is a wearing of a haggard expression or that of a well balanced and beautiful visage, the love is just the same. If I may speak somewhat guardedly, we see that the freshness of youth is attractive to the young man who is drawn to his maiden friend. Well, the years go by, age takes possession and the wrinkles begin to show; but that does not affect the love, does it? People do not throw over the one that they have loved for many, many years. Of course a few wrinkles appear, or there may even be some disfigurement. Even so, love to Christ will not be altered because we see Him in His agony in the Garden, or in His agonies on the cross. You will not say: "Well now, I can accept Christ in His beauty, but I cannot accept Christ like this." Love to Christ will be love to Christ under all conditions. We shall have love to Christ when He is rejected of men; we shall cleave to Him for what He is and who He is, and for what He has accomplished. 'So fair a face bedewed with tears,' says the poet:

So fair a face bedewed with tears;  
What beauty e'en in grief appears!  
He wept, he bled, he died for you;  
What more, ye saints, could Jesus do?

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So: "My Beloved is more to me than all others that I love, even when I see His fair face bedewed with tears of agony sitting upon it, as I remember that He says: All this I do for thee." O what an expression of love in action! "All this I do, and have done, for thee." Why did Christ lay down His life, why did He agonize in the Garden? Was it for your salvation, was it to save you from your sins, was it to deliver you from a hell eternal? Then how attractive will be the scars of battle to your view. I would say this in a very careful and reverential way, that Christ will be your Hero, and certainly He is a Hero far superceding any other person, because He has saved you from going down into the pit. "My Beloved is more than another beloved because He has accomplished my salvation." We can do many things for one another; we can do many things for our children, but we cannot accomplish their salvation. Is this a reason, then? Surely it must be a reason

why my Beloved is more than another beloved, because He, and He alone, can accomplish my salvation; "He has accomplished my salvation; so therefore I am bound to love Him more. He has given me eternal praise, He has given me eternal life, He has given me eternal joy in prospect."

Then also, He will give grace as well as glory. What is thy beloved more than another beloved? Has He given you grace? You know, friends, grace is a great blessing; it is a very extensive word, covering a very wide field. Yes, it is a great blessing. You know, we live in an evil world; a world which is full of sin, a world which is full of hatred, a world which is unrelenting, unfeeling. But O, how boundless is that grace which comes from Christ, to see things in a different light. "I love Him," you may say, "because He has given to me His Spirit." That spirit is the spirit of submission to the will of God. This is a choice grace, and those of you that have the grace of God will know a little of what a blessing it is to have the grace of God. You can be in the depth of trouble, and yet believe love is in it; you can feel to be in the midst of affliction, to suffer many losses and yet to see that the love of Christ is in it.

Trials must and will befall;  
But with humble faith to see  
Love inscribed upon them all,  
This is happiness to me.

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There is no happiness in the world, really. People say that they are happy, but this is real happiness, which my Beloved can give to me, and which no-one else can give. Is not that a reason that we can give to this question: What is thy beloved more than another beloved? "Because He has given me of His grace."

Now you see, grace teaches us to pray. Do we love our Beloved because He has taught us to pray? Maybe it has taken a long time to teach us how to pray aright. Right prayers are contained in a very small compass: 'Thy will be done.' That is the fulness of right prayer - Thy will be done.

Father, thy will be done,  
In words we oft express;  
When in our hearts we want our own,  
And wish our sufferings less.

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But: "My Beloved has given me of His grace, in the midst of all adversity and sufferings, to say: Thy will be done. 'Whate'er consists not with Thy will, O teach me to resign.'" There is a great deal of happiness in submitting to the will of God. I would make this point clear, that by the grace of God there is submission to the will of God; but we do not submit because we have to, because there is no alternative to submitting to the will of God. Where grace is given, there is a willing submission, and a willing submission in such a way that we do not desire any alternative. We are satisfied with what He has laid upon us, knowing that it is given us for our good. 'The lash is steeped He on thee lays, And softened in

His blood.' When you see these things, which the grace of God produces, it is bound to direct you to your Beloved, Who is above every other beloved. You see, because we are of the earth, earthy, when joined together in the matrimonial bond, we are still of the earth earthy, and as much as we may want to give one another the grace of God, we cannot. We cannot rise above ourselves. But our Beloved is able to communicate that grace that will enable us to rise above ourselves and submit to the will of God. Then we can put it in the remarkable way that Joseph Hart puts it:

How harsh soe'er the way,  
Dear Saviour, still lead on,  
Nor leave us till we say,  
"Father, thy will be done."  
At most we do but taste the cup,  
For thou alone hast drunk it up.

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We are willing to suffer all that God lays upon us and submit to His will, because we can see there is love in it. There is little love in the world today. Love, even naturally, in the past, found it necessary to administer some discipline and some correction. But in the sad day in which we live, how little correction and discipline is administered or enforced; and with what sad and solemn results. But Christ will continue in the old way of things - Ask for the old paths - of discipline that is enforced, chastisement that is given to us for our good.

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' Well: "I love Him because He is faithful and He has my case in hand, my case at heart; and so, whatever happens to me, however trying the circumstances, it is His love which permits it; even though it may be very far removed from the happier side of love, when there is gentle teaching, when there is a smile, when there is a closeness felt; yet this is all of love." There is a very beautiful expression in Paul's Epistle to Philemon: For love's sake. 'For love's sake.' Now you see, Christ, for love's sake, caused His visage to be more marred than any man's, for love's sake He endured intolerable sufferings to put away the sin of His church; for love's sake He corrects His church in measure as they go along, in order that the desire of their heart might be answered, which is to be conformed to the image of His Son, to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings. This may sound very strange to uninitiated ears; it may seem very strange to the carnal mind, the ungodly, to the man in the street who has no time for religion; they will fail to understand it; but we are setting before you this afternoon just a few reasons, outside of the immediate context, (perhaps in one sense we may say more homely reasons,) whereby the children of God feel a drawing to their Beloved and makes them see that He is more precious than anyone else.

Now, there is something very special about God's grace. You see, God, even our Lord Jesus Christ, is endowed with a fulness of patience. He never loses His temper. Some may have to confess that they are short tempered. But has Jesus ever lost His temper with you? 'Behold His patience lengthened out, to those who

from Him rove.' You eventually discover this to be true. 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' "He excels in patience; that is why I have to put Him above everyone else. He excels in patience, and though I have vexed Him ten thousand times ten thousand, yet He has still remained the same. He has still remained by my side. He has seen me in a tantrum, when I have realized that I would have done all I could to bring Him down from His authority; but He still sits there." You see, it is when we get to the end of our tantrums that we see God has not moved at all. Then we feel ashamed of ourselves, and feel a deep and intense love to Him Who has not moved at all. Sometimes when our sins have been great upon us, and I speak now of the sins of our heart and the failings thereof, then we are completely ashamed of ourselves. One has said: 'I looked for hell, He gave me heaven.' How remarkable to a backsliding sinner, who expects nothing else but hell, felt it would be his just desert. But he has to say: 'Amazed to see myself so vile, and Jesus smiling all the while.'

Now surely this will be that which will captivate your soul and give you a clear understanding that your Beloved excels every other beloved, however dear other beloveds may be to you, for you are made very conscious that they are not capable of those excellent characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ.

'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' 'There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.' When we look at the tale of our sins, the extent of them, then to have those sins forgiven, to have them washed away in the blood of Christ, to feel the power of forgiveness, as felt in our souls, how wonderful this is! No-one else can do it. 'Who is this that forgiveth sins?' was the question that was raised by the Pharisees when Jesus was upon the earth. 'There is none that can forgive sins, but God alone.' 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' Now you will discover, and maybe you have not thought of this discovery before - He is the Eternal God because He can forgive sins; He is the Eternal God because He came down to be a Man and die, in order that in humanity He should forgive sins. You see, He stood in our place and stead. You will so love your Beloved because He forgives sins; not by by-passing them, but by receiving those sins which His Father laid upon Him. 'All we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' And the Lord was so willing to receive that iniquity. What for? Why, to suffer for it, to put it away by suffering, through this to bring about the means of forgiveness. The church of God is not forgiven without a price being paid. 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' "He has suffered for my sin, He has suffered to pay the price, and He has done it." What a blessing that is!

If we are born again of the Spirit then we shall be made honest, and certainly honest before God, and certainly honest with respect to our sins. We



shall want to know that they are properly dealt with, and that our forgiveness is on a good foundation. Well now, the one here spoken to, whose Beloved exceeds other beloveds, has had her sins forgiven. Not only the sins of her youth. The Psalmist said: 'Remember not the sins of my youth.' Not only the sins before the call by grace; but it is the sins against light and knowledge, the sins of the backslider in heart, and all the sins that we will commit down to the end of our life. Every one of them has been taken into account and has been provided for in the covenant arrangement of the Father with His Son, when the Son undertook to pay the penalty due to that terrible catalogue, so as to properly and honourably discharge them. 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' "He is the only One Who can do this."

Then again, forgiveness is not something that cannot be known. It is something that is known in God's appointed time. You may have to wait. Some have perhaps been waiting for a long time, but you must get this blessing because there are no unforgiven sinners in heaven. When it comes to you, then you will surely have to say in answer to this question: What is thy Beloved more than another beloved: "It is because He has power to forgive sin; He has power also to forgive sin on a right footing." There is a story of a person who at one time was attached to the Roman Catholic church. Eventually the Lord dealt with her and brought her away from that system; but when this person was on her dying bed the local priest got to hear about it and so he went to visit her. She asked him for what he had come, and he replied: "I have come to forgive your sins." She said to him, Show me your hands. He, of course not understanding what she meant, showed her his hands, and she said: "You are not the man who can forgive sins; the Man Who can forgive sins has holes in His hands." 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' It is that you know the Man, and you are not mistaken in the Man that can forgive sins. It is Jesus, Jesus crucified. Why did the Apostle lay such emphasis upon his determination, when he said: 'And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling . . . For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.' You see, it is the crucifixion that distinguishes the Man Who can forgive sins. It is the crucifixion that sets this point clear, which the devil cannot answer.

Forgiveness! 'tis a joyful sound  
To malefactors doomed to die.

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Now you see, to feel that you are forgiven is more than just seeing it in the Scriptures, more than just seeing that the children of God are forgiven. "My Beloved is more than another beloved because He can tell me that my sins are forgiven, and furthermore, He can tell me about the future." Most of us are concerned about the future in one way or another, but "my Beloved can tell me about the future. This

is why He is above every one else." You may find people who may make their predictions. Sometimes they make their predictions upon a sound basis, but those predictions do not always come to pass; but "my Beloved can tell me about the future, and not only so, but He can tell me about the future years before the future ever materializes." There is a very precious word in Isaiah's prophecy which describes my Beloved in this way: Declaring the end from the beginning. The people of God often speak of their doubts and fears and their anxieties, but my Beloved can tell me about the future. What does He say? 'The righteous shall hold on his way.' When does He say it? Have some of you felt the application of that word in the earlier part of your experience, but now you say: "Well, of course it cannot be right." The devil will say it cannot be right, because you have only just started. Well, God can tell you what the end is going to be, and this is why "my Beloved is more to me than any other beloved."

My fears sometimes say I never shall find,  
In death's awful day true peace in my mind.

Then you want One Who can tell you about the future, Who will be able to settle all things and give you the consolation of the blessed truth that the eternal God will give you an answer to Satan when he suggests that you will never find peace in death's awful day; it is this:

But tho' thus surrounded, yet, when I come there  
I can't be confounded, the Lord will appear. 321

He will appear in accordance with that which is written: Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him. But alas, to the wicked, it shall be ill with him. The Lord is honourable, He is faithful in all His house. If a wicked person should have the audacity to ask Him about the future, He would tell him: Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him. But to the righteous, it shall be well with him. O how glorious! Are you anxious with respect to the future? Now, what does your Beloved say with respect to the future? 'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'

Now that is another aspect, another reason why we can say, if we are Christ's, that our Beloved is more to us than another beloved, if we should be asked this question: 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?' "He has assured me that He will come and receive me unto Himself." You know, the Lord Jesus gives great and precious promises, which He is able to perform. Men and women, fathers and mothers, they may make promises, sometimes in all integrity, and they have every intention to perform those promises; but then something

comes along, and they find they are not able to do so. But Jesus is able, and that is why He will become to you a Beloved above every other beloved, for in your most dire circumstances, when everyone else has to stand back, He is still able, able to fulfil His promise, able to fulfil the promise that He has spoken to you years before. As you come into the waters of death, into the Jordan of death, and you lay upon your dying bed, now everybody else has to stand back. Everybody else, your nearest and dearest, your spiritual friends, your minister, your pastor, the servants of God, they all have to stand back. But your Beloved will step forward, and as we have it so beautifully expressed, will come and receive you unto Himself, that where He is, there you may be also.

That being so, then what is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? Is it not a good reason, are these not good reasons, although different from the context itself, that you could give for your hope in Christ? "I hope to die shouting, the Lord will appear." "Because my Beloved is faithful in all His house. He is a God that cannot lie, and He will not alter the thing that has gone out of His lips, out of His mouth."

May the Lord grant us a clear answer to this question, if we are asked, and there is every reason that we should be asked. You know, really, Zion would be better, much more healthy, if these kind of questions were asked. If we are carnal, we shall think upon such a question as being impudent. "Why should he ask me that, why should she ask me that?" We should think upon these things. Where do you think conversation was truly centred in those days mentioned in Malachi? 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.' Have you ever thought about their conversation? Would it not have been in questions and answers? How much of our conversation is in question and answer form? O then, may it be ours, to the blessing of Zion, to be asking: 'What is thy beloved more than another beloved?' "You speak about Jesus Christ, then why is He so precious to you?" May we be able to give a good answer, even though it is a simple answer, even though it is an answer which we feel is so below what we would say; but nevertheless it is an answer.

The Lord grant His blessing.

Amen.

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