



A GARDEN inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. ¹³ Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, ¹⁴ Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: ¹⁵ A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. ¹⁶ Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. (Song of Songs 4:12-16)

What wonderful images are conjured up in our imaginations at these descriptive adjectives of the Bride of Christ – His Church! If we cast our eyes about today at the modern churches, it is difficult to see the comparison, isn't it? The Church is to be a Garden Enclosed. The hedges round about are those of truth and faith. These are intended to protect against the sensual and lawless influences of the world without. When truth is trampled underfoot, and faith withers as a rose deprived of the waters of life, then the world invades with her decadent music, culture, and false promises. The birds (demons) of Matthew 13:4, 19, and 31-32 come to nest in her abnormally overgrown branches. Instead of a Garden, the Church becomes a dismal wilderness. The Fountain of Living Waters is abandoned to the detriment of the workers of the vineyard.

The Garden of the Lord is intended to provide salt, Light, and a good savour to the world around it. The influences of the Church should provide a healing for the nations: *Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.* (Song of Songs 1:3), but has become, instead, a whirlpool mixed so richly with truth and error that the difference cannot be discerned. *Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.* (Ecclesiastes 10:1) Instead of serving as a healing

ointment to the society about us, the Church has poisoned that society with a false Gospel of man-centered entertainment and false hope.

I am sure that many who read these comments I regularly make in condemnation of the modern church grow weary of hearing them and perhaps believe my claims are exaggerated; but the same was true of a namesake of mine of far greater inspiration and discernment than I can attain – Jeremiah the Prophet. He constantly ranted over the errors of Israel and warned of their imminent destruction and fall into the bondage of Babylon. When I remember the courageous and glorious Christian men who built this country and sustained it with their own blood, I know the reason for America's past greatness. School children in my day were still taught moral values based upon the Holy Bible in public schools. We recited a Psalm daily, the Lord's Prayer, sang a verse of America (My Country tis of Thee), and pledged allegiance to the flag. Homosexuality was a dirty joke, and drug abuse was simply unheard of. That is the testimony of the Church of that day. Men and women believed to the point that their faith was acted out in their public service.

But look outward today at the fruits of the church. Just yesterday, I saw a news report of a so-called church in Madison, Wisconsin, - the Lion of Judha (*sic*) - using marijuana as part of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Do you recall the deafening silence of the churches when prayer and the Bible were removed from our public schools by a corrupt judiciary (US Supreme Court), and when the murder of the most innocent of human beings was permitted by that same Court through the abominable sin of abortion? Now we have churches actually advocating abortion as a godly right and homosexual marriage as an estate esteemed by God. Our youth are subjected to the most hideous forms of pornography in public schools in the name of 'sex education.' No wonder we see the declining respect for law and of God in our modern America. Our politicians are corrupt, and our churches, for the most part, are silent on the great sins of our nation.

Are we a Garden of Delight to the world, or something that has grown sinister in our hypocrisy? Will we grow wholesome fruit in our youthful charges, or has our Garden of Delight become a morass of weeds and unhealthy swamp-water in which they perish?

My mother was a dedicated gardener – so is my wife. They both always arose at first light to tend to the tender plants in the garden by weeding the sins away and applying the water of life. They both remind me of Mary Magdalene who went to another Garden while it was yet dark to find the true Gardener of Souls. I am sure that the *dew was still on the roses* when she arrived at that Garden seeking a dead Lord, but, instead, found a Living Saviour. She supposedly mistook Jesus for the Gardener, but she was right in the first case, for He is truly the Gardener of Souls. He tenderly removes the weeds of temptation from us by imparting His grace and instilling the faith and truth of His Gospel. He has long before prepared the soil and hedged the Garden about to keep out beasts and predators. He has built His tall Tower in the midst of the Garden as a watchpoint for error and false prophets. This Tower is manned by the Holy Ghost as a Guide to understanding His Word. He has pruned the proud shrubs and flowers to prevent their growing larger than goodness and humility will permit. And He is at the Vineyard of Souls from before daylight until slumber of sleep.

Like Mary, we may not at first recognize the Gardener, but that does not mean He is not present and seeking our joyful recognition.. We may even converse with Him on mundane matters which later grow large in truth to our dim view. And then He may call us by name to open our eyes. Or He may reveal Himself in the breaking of Bread as He did to the two distraught disciples on the Road to Emmaus. In our dire moments of

doubt and fear in the Wilderness of Sin, He may open our tear-filled eyes to the Fountain of Life right before us as He did for the poor maiden, Hagar, in the Wilderness of Beersheba. He knows the great need of our soul far better than we, for He is the Master Husbandman. If we take to heart the counsel of the center verse of the Bible, Psalms 118:8, and Acts 5:29, we shall be protected from even the smaller temptations the world may offer: *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.* (Song of Songs 2:15-17)

For some reason, this verse reminds me of the counsel of Proverbs 22:6 – *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* Perhaps our spoiled youth are the tender grapes who need some defense against those little foxes (which is wanting). Perhaps an unhealthy diet has made them grow obese physically in the same way that impure religion has caused them to grow spiritually obese and sterile.

There is a wholesome and healthy feast that awaits the patient and the faithful – the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. He has made all things ready for those elected, called and invited: *I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.* (Song of Songs 5:1)

I believe the modern church has forgotten her First Love. We have forgotten purity and honor, faith and grace, testimony and the One who purchased us from the bonds of slavery. Our Lord Jesus Christ loves His true Bride, the Church, with a love that transforms and endures the pains of death – and even survives death. Hear His love song to His Bride – a song which the church can never deserve, but love makes no conditions:

¹ *Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.* ² *My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.* ³ *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.* ⁴ *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.* ⁵ *Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead.* ⁶ *Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.* ⁷ *As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.* ⁸ *There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number (false churches of the world).* ⁹ **My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her.** *The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.* ¹⁰ *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?* ¹¹ *I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.* ¹² *Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.* ¹³ *Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.* (Song of Songs 6:1-13) Have you remembered, Church, that it is the Lord who is our Husband and Maker? *For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.* (Isaiah 54:5).

Being sons and daughters of the Most High God, should our characters not reflect the purity, love, patience power, and majesty of our Father and the King of Kings?