

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS VINEYARD

A Sermon

Delivered by

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“My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.” — Song of Solomon 8:12.”

Dou are aware that these Canticles are responsive songs,— that one sentence is uttered by Solomon, and the next by Solyma, his spouse. We believe that, in this ‘Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s,’ we also hear Christ speaking to His Church, His bride, and the Church responding to His words of love in tones which His love has suggested to her. The fact that it is a responsive song sometimes renders it the more difficult to understand, because it is not easy, in every case, to discover whether it is Solomon or Solyma (Christ or His Church) that is speaking. The first sentence in our text is just of that character; it may be Christ who says, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.” Or it may be His Church, which is saying, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.” With regard to the latter part of the verse, we have no difficulty, for we can see, upon the very face of it, that it is addressed by the spouse, the bride, to her Divine Bridegroom, to whom she says, “Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand.”

I. Let us look at the first sentence: “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.” We have no difficulty in understanding that this vineyard is Christ’s Church. She is not compared to a grove of trees, — even of fruit-bearing trees, — because there are many trees which are valuable, not only for their fruit, but also for their timber; and

should they bring forth no fruit, they would still be of some value. Not so is it with the members of Christ's Church; they are like the vine, for the vine, if it bringeth forth no fruit, is fit for nothing, it cumbereth the ground. The Lord said to the prophet Ezekiel, "What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? Or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel: the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?" No, if it is fruitless, it is useless. It must bear fruit, or it is of no value whatsoever. Hence the Church is always compared to a vineyard, because, if she does not bring forth fruit to the Lord Jesus Christ, she is less useful even than an ordinary mercantile and commercial community. That mercantile community, or body corporate, instituted for wise purposes, may further some useful design; but the Church is of no use whatever unless she brings forth the fruits of holiness and of gratitude to her Lord, her Divine Husbandman. Better that she be not called a church at all than that she should pretend to be the Church of Christ, and yet bring forth no fruit to His praise.

So we have no difficulty in understanding that the vineyard, mentioned in the text, is Christ's Church, because it is so significant a symbol of the body of believers banded together in love to their Saviour, and known by the name of "the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ." We must, therefore, consider the opening sentence of our text as being, first, **THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**; and here you see at once two things, — first, that Christ claims a special property in His Church; and, secondly, that He has special regard and care for her: "*My* vineyard, which is *mine*, is before *me*."

The Master here, then, *claims a special property in His Church*. Twice does He mention that claim: "*My* vineyard, which is *mine*," as if He meant to assert His rights, and to maintain them against all comers; being ready to defend them in Heaven's High Court of Chancery, or before all the hosts of His enemies who might seek to snatch His inheritance from Him. "Whatever is not mine," saith the Divine Lover, "my Church is. She is so mine that, if I gave up Lebanon, if I should renounce Bashan, and give up all the rest of my possessions, I must retain Zion, my vineyard, my best-beloved." We know that the Church is Christ's by special bonds, — not simply by creation. It is true that the Lord Jesus has created all His people, but then He does not claim them merely upon that ground, because all men are His by creation; nay, the very devils in hell are His in that sense; and, therefore, He does not claim His Church simply by the right of being her Creator. Nor doth He claim her merely by the prerogatives of providence; for, in that sense, the cattle on a thousand hills are his, and the lions of the forest, and the young ravens which cry unto him, for He supplieth their needs. All things are His by providence, from the stars of heaven down to the midge in the summer's air, or the worm that conceals

itself in the grass at eventide. But our Lord Jesus claims His Church by a far higher title than that of creation or providence. Nor is the Church His merely by right of conquest. It is true that He hath fought for His people, and that they may be considered as the spoils that He hath taken in war; He hath rescued His people from the hand of him that was stronger than they; all of them, as He shall take them with him into heaven, may be looked upon as signs and wonders, trophies of what His strong arm hath done in delivering them from their mighty and malignant foes. But, beloved, Christ claims His Church by a better title even than this.

First, He claims the Church as His own by His Father's gift. You know that the Church is the property of all the three Persons of the holy and blessed Trinity. She is the Father's property by election; she is the Son's property by donation, passing from the hand of the Father to that of the Mediator; and, then, the Church is the Spirit's by His indwelling and inhabitation; so that all three of the Divine Persons have a right to the Church for some special office which they exercise towards her. So Christ claims His Church as His Father's gift, a love-token, a reward, a sign of the Father's favour and regard towards Him. He looks on His people as being dear, not only for their own sakes, but for the sake of Him who gave them to His Son, to be His for ever and ever. They are His, then, by donation; and, as such, since the Father gave them to Him, they are very, very precious in His sight.

Next, Christ's Church is His by purchase. There are some who say that all men are Christ's by purchase. But, beloved, you and I do not believe in a sham redemption which does not redeem. We do not believe in a universal redemption which extends even to those who were in hell before the Saviour died, and which includes the fallen angels as well as unrepentant men. We believe in an effectual redemption, and can never agree with those who would teach us that Christ's blood was shed in vain. The good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep. Christ loved His Church, and gave Himself for it. He bought His own people with His blood. He purchased, not the world's wide wilderness, but the "spot enclosed by grace," the vineyard which His own right hand hath planted. Dear, then, to the heart of Jesus is every vine, and every cluster of grapes, in this vineyard, because He bought the whole of it with His blood. As Naboth, when asked to sell his vineyard to Ahab, answered the king, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee," and kept it even at the cost of his life; do you think that our Lord Jesus will ever part with His vineyard, which is not only His by inheritance from his Father, but also His by purchase, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold," but with His own most precious blood? On every leaf in that vineyard, His blood hath fallen. The red juice that flows so freely from the clusters, when pressed, is but His blood in another form. If the soil of the vineyard be rich, it is because He hath enriched it with His blood. If the vines bring forth plenteously, it is because of the care He has taken with them.

More than this, the Church is Christ's by one other tie, which, perhaps, makes it dearer still to Him. She is His bride, His spouse. Now, whatever a man may not have a right to, he certainly has a right to his own espoused wife. Whatever legal quibbles may be raised about a piece of earth, about a man's title to his freehold property, to his own wife he certainly has a clear right and title. And Jesus looks into the eyes of His spouse, when He hath redeemed her out of the hand of the enemy, and taken her unto Himself, — when He hath placed the jewels of His grace about her neck, and in her ears, and on her hands, when He hath adorned her with the robe of His own righteousness, and made her beautiful in his beauty, — He looks at her, and He says, "Thou art mine; thou art mine; and no one else can claim thee. My spouse, thou art no harlot, thou shalt not play the part of an adulteress with many lovers, for thou art mine, and no one but myself can claim thee. None but myself shall partake of thine embraces, none but myself shall receive of the love of thy heart."

By these three ties, then, O thou Church of Christ, thou art His special property, and by each of these thou art endeared to Him! Jesus sees on thee, O Church of God, the mark of His Father's love-gift! He sees, too, the evidence of His own loving purchase, and His espousal of thee unto Himself, to be His forever and ever.

But we must pass on to notice that, in the first sentence of our text, we are not only told about Christ's special right to His Church, but also about *His special care and observation of her*: "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me."

The Church is 'before' Christ in the sense that He so loves her that He never has her out of His presence. The vineyard is so dear to the Husbandman that He never leaves it. He may sometimes hide himself among the vines; but He is always close at hand, watching how they progress, and delighting Himself with their fragrance and fruitfulness. The Bridegroom is never absent from His spouse, for He loves her too much to be separated from her. Is it not a sweet thought that believers are ever under the eye of Christ? He would not be happy unless He had them continually before Him. His Church may be willing to endure His absence for a while, but He loves her so much that He cannot bear to be away from her. She may grow so cold towards Him that His absence may seem, to her, to be but a small matter; but the decay of her love is not a little matter to Him. His love is strong as death, His jealousy is cruel as the grave, so He cannot bear to have her out of His sight even for a minute. He will always pour upon her the beams of His love, and ever fix upon her the affection of His whole heart.

The expression, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me," may also mean that Jesus is always caring for it, as well as always loving it. There is never a moment

when Christ ceases to care for His vineyard. He Himself said, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." What! Water it every moment? Keep it night and day? Yes, He will never neglect it. His word to His Church is, "Lo, I am with you alway;"— not merely for half a day, or for an hour in the day, leaving His ministers to care for them at other times; — but, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Jesus still walketh among the golden candlesticks; He doth not light the candles, and then leave them to burn by themselves; but He walks among them, and so keeps them from going out. "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me." Christ is always in His Church, always caring for His Church, always bidding His providence assist her agencies, always upholding her in her hours of trial, leading her into all truth, instructing her sons and daughters, and making all her members "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

There is also, in this expression, not only the sense of love and care, but also of knowledge: "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me." Christ knows every vine in the vineyard, and He knows all the fruit that is on each vine, and how much there was last year, and how much there will be in years to come. Before there was a vine in that vineyard, Christ knew how many plants would be planted where they would be put, of what sort they would be, and how much fruit they would bring forth. He did not find out by degrees what His inheritance was to be; He knew all about it long before the worlds were formed. There is nothing in His Church that is new to Him; He foreknew, and foresaw, and foreordained every single particle of mould that lies in that vineyard, and every stone that is in its walls, and every vine growing within them; ay, and every leaf, yea, and every particle of blight or mildew that falls upon a leaf; all has been settled and ordained, or foreknown and prepared for by the great Proprietor.

"My vineyard, which is mine, is before me." There is a sweet thought here for all who love the Saviour. You, as His Church, and each one of you who are His people, are specially preserved by Him. Then, "why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" I tell thee, soul, that He sees thee as much as if there were no others for His eyes to look upon; and He cares for thee as infinitely, and with as undivided a heart, as if thou wert the only soul that He ever bought with His blood. If thou wert His only elect one, His only redeemed one, His only loved one, He could not deal with thee more tenderly and more lovingly than He is dealing with thee now. If thou art Christ's, thou art never behind His back, thou art ever before Him. He can always see thee, though thou canst not always see Him. When the eye of thy faith is dim, the eye of His care is not. When thy heart seems dead and cold, His heart is still hot with infinite affection; and when thou sayest, "My God has ceased to be gracious," thou dost belie Him, and slander Him. He is really manifesting His graciousness in

another fashion. He has changed the manifestation of His purpose of love and mercy; but His purpose is the same as ever, — to drench thee with floods of mercy, to wash thee with streams of grace, and to fertilize thee till thou shalt be like that Eshcol “branch with one cluster of grapes,” which was so large and weighty that “they bare it between two upon a staff;” — nay, more, till the great Husbandman shall make of thee such a vine as earth has scarcely seen as yet, and shall, therefore, have to transplant thee to a better vineyard, even to the hill-top of glory.

I think, then, if we regard the first sentence as the language of Christ, it is very sweet to hear Him say, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.” My brethren, the deacons and elders of the church, must always take comfort from this thought. If there is anything in the church that grieves us, we must feel, “It is *His* vineyard, not ours; it is before Him, so He will know what to do with it.” I am sure, dear brethren, we should lay down our tasks if we had not our Master with us. I should not dare to be a minister, and you would not dare to be church officers, unless we felt that it was before Him. In your different districts, let the sick, the sorrowful, the backsliding, all be carried before your God; and let all the members feel that, although we are but feeble creatures to be the leaders of so great a host, yet that the church may grow and increase until we are not only fifteen hundred, but fifteen thousand if the Lord will, and that the church would then be just as carefully looked after as it is now, for it would still, be before Him. He who is the Husbandman is just as able to care for His vines when they are most numerous as if there were only one, and that one had the whole of His attention.

II. Now, very briefly, I want you to regard this first sentence of our text as **THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH ITSELF.**

According to the eleventh verse, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.” So, dear brethren, every one of us whom the Lord has brought to Himself, has a part of His vineyard to keep for him. We do not sing, with Wesley,

*A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky,”*

because we do not believe anything of the kind. We leave the work of saving our souls in higher hands than our own; but after our souls are saved, then we have a charge to keep, and that charge is, to publish the name and fame of Jesus to the utmost of our power, to seek to bring others under the sound of the gospel, and to tell them what they must do to be saved.

There are a great many people, who seem to forget that they have a vineyard of their own to keep; or else, if they remember it, they cannot say, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me," for they go about gazing on other people's vineyards, instead of keeping their eyes fixed upon their own. They say, "Look at So-and-so's vineyard; I don't think he trims his vines in the new style." I usually notice that those persons, who have such wonderful plans of their own, and who are always finding fault with other people's plans, never do anything except find fault. I like the deacons and elders of the church, and the teachers in the Sunday school, to have no other plan than this, — to do all the good they can, and to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. When they are doing that, let other people not interfere with them, but themselves do all the good that they can. It is always well when a man has his work before him, knows what he is going to do, and then goes straight at it. There are far too many people gadding about to see what others are doing, and to find out their plans and methods of working. Let me tell you, brethren, that the best way to succeed is to have no plan but this, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." When I see the members of a church laying down a multiplicity of rules, I know that they are getting themselves into a multiplicity of troubles. If they will but leave rules and regulations to come up when they are needed, they will find them when they want them. Let every man, who has the Spirit of God within him, set about the work which he is called to do. Let him attend to the portion of the vineyard which is before him, and try to get his thousand pieces of silver out of his own portion, and not out of another's. There is always a set of grumblers about, who think they could preach better, and manage Sunday schools better, than anybody else. They are the people who generally do nothing at all.

I sometimes receive anonymous letters, asking me to amend my style in this way or the other. I know where they come from, — they are either from people who are very idle, to whom the penny post gives occupation for their idle hours, or from those who think they can bring themselves to our notice by their communications. I usually thrust all such letters into the fire. Now, if these people, instead of wasting their time in that way, would write a letter, with good sound gospel teaching in it, to some poor sinner who wants to know the way of salvation; or if, instead of wasting their pennies upon me, — for I think I can do better without their advice than with it, — they would bestow them upon some poor crossing-sweeper, they would do more good. It is always the grumbling souls who are the idle souls; but the men, who get the thousand pieces of silver out of their vineyard, have their own work so constantly before them that they have no leisure to look upon the work of other people with the view of finding fault with it. They know right well that they have no right to interfere between other men and their Master; and that, to their own Master, each one must stand or fall.

I pray that this church, and every member of it, may ever be able to say, in the words of our text, “ ‘My vineyard, which is *mine*, is before me.’ I am not responsible for my brother, but I am responsible for myself. I will always keep my own work before my eyes; I will go about it, and do what I have to do just as if there were nobody else in the world to do anything. I will work as hard as if I were the only Christian alive; at the same time, I will always comfort myself with the thought that my feeble labours are not all that are being rendered to the Master, but that there are more than seventy thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and who are serving the one living and true God. I will, while I am working, wish to every other worker greater success than I have myself. If I see any prospering more than I am myself, I will bless God for it; but I will still say, ‘My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.’ However well my neighbour is getting on, that is no reason why I should slacken my efforts; and however badly another may succeed, that is no reason why I should neglect my own duty in order to chide him, ‘My vineyard, which is mine, is before me.’ ”

The next time you are tempted to complain of some brother or sister, check yourself, and say, “It is my vineyard which is before me; there are some ugly thistles in it, and some great nettles over there in the corner. I have not trimmed my vines this summer; I have not taken the little foxes, which spoil the vines; but, henceforth, I will attend more diligently to ‘my vineyard, which is mine.’ ” A blessed way of keeping from finding fault with other people is to look well to your own vineyard.

III. I will now turn to the second part of our text, which is **THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH TO HER GREAT PROPRIETOR AND LORD**: “Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand,” — “*must* have a thousand.” Whatever others have, our Lord must have Solomon’s portion; “and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.” So, then, in the first place, the fruit of the vineyard belongs to Christ; but, in the second place, both Christ and His Church agree to reward the keepers of the vineyard, and to let them have their two hundred.

First, then, *all the fruit of the vineyard belongs to Christ, and He must have it*. Dwell on that word ‘*must*’, and let each one of you feel the blessed necessity. There are some churches where, if they have any fruit, they keep it to themselves. The Word has free course, and is glorified; sinners are saved, saints are comforted, and then they take the honour and glory to themselves. Other churches there are, which give all the glory to the minister. The work succeeds well, everything prospers, and then the keeper of the vineyard has the thousand pieces of silver. There are other churches, which give all the glory to the rich people in their midst. “Everything will go well,” say they, “while the squire attends with us, while Mr So-and-so is one of our deacons, and Mr So-and-so is so generous a subscriber to our funds.” So that, there also, the thousand pieces of silver are given to man. Ah, but they must not be,

brethren. Stand back, ye intruders! We dare not give you so much as a farthing's worth of the fruit of this vineyard. The vineyard is Christ's; He purchased it with His own life's blood; so the fruit is all His, and He must have it all, none of it must be given to anyone else. Open wide thy hand, O thief, and give up the fruit thou hast taken unto thyself! We demand it of thee imperatively; give it all up, sir, for Jesus Christ must have it all, even as Solomon had the thousand pieces of silver.

But, brothers and sisters, it sometimes happens that, in a church, there is no glory at all. The church is so badly off, the congregation is so small, there is such an absence of zeal, and so very feeble has the spirit of prayer become, that there is no glory to be given to anyone. What shall we say to such a church as that? "Brethren, do not rest satisfied with such a state of things as that; do not say, 'Solomon must be content with a hundred.' No, he must have his thousand." I want all the members of this church to feel that *our* Solomon, our Lord Jesus Christ, must have His thousand pieces of silver. We must not allow one year to go below the mark of the previous one. If Christ received glory through us last year, He must have as much or more glory through us this year. If we had a revival in years gone by, we must have a revival now. If Solomon had a thousand pieces of silver from us once, we must never let our tribute to Him be any less. Souls must still be brought to the Saviour, even should —

*“The wide world esteem it strange,
Gaze and admire, and hate the change.”*

The ministry must still be powerful, the prayer-meetings must continue to be full of faith and fervour, the members must keep on striving together in love for the extension of Christ's kingdom; His kingdom must come, and His will must be done on earth as it is in heaven. We will not put in an 'if' or a 'perhaps'; it *must* be so, and we will not be satisfied unless it is. "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand."

Suppose, my brethren, in looking back upon the past year, we find that we have not had so much of the Master's presence, and have not done so much for Him, as in years gone by, shall we say that we will make it up next year? Oh, no! That will not do; our Solomon must have His thousand this year. Shall He have less than the stipulated rental for His vineyard? Shall I contribute less, today, to my Lord's honour than I did yesterday? Shall I be less zealous, less useful, less industrious? Shall the minister preach less than he did? Shall the elders visit less than they used to do? Will you, church members, pray less, and serve Christ less? If you love Him less, you will do so. But, brethren, I trust that you do not love Him less. I am sure that you owe Him *more*, because you are plunging every day deeper and deeper into debt to Him. He is continually revealing to you more and more of the heights and depths, and lengths and breadths, of His love, that passeth knowledge; He is ever

leading you further, and yet further still, into the mysteries of His kingdom, and teaching you to know Himself, which is much more than knowing mere doctrine; so I ask you, — Can you love Him less than you did in the years gone by? Will you pray to Him less earnestly and praise Him less fervently? No, brethren and sisters, I think that, as Christians, we shall unanimously cry, “As we come nearer to thyself, O Lord, make us the more fruitful! And as years increase upon us, let it not be said that we do less for our Master at fifty than we did at five-and-twenty.” Let not people be able to say concerning any one of us, “He did run well; what did hinder him?” Let not the Spirit of God have to chide any one of us, and say, “Thou hast left thy first love.” Let us insist upon it that, as we began, so we will continue; or, rather, that we will not simply go on as we began, but that we will seek to go ‘from strength to strength,’ until every one of us shall appear in Zion before our God. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the undiminished beauty and the undivided love of your Lord, that ye love Him no less than ye did in the day of your espousal to Him! O ye keepers of the vineyard, my brethren in the ministry, and ye who go out from this church to preach the Word, if ye gave Him glory last year, if ye loved the souls of men, if ye knew how to wrestle with the Angel of the covenant in months gone by, you must do the same now! You must not do less than you used to do, you must not preach less earnestly, you must not pray less fervently; but you must, rather, love Him more, and serve Him better. May the Spirit of God enable you so to do!

But alas, there are some of you who never give our King Solomon anything. Perhaps you are the people of God; at least, you profess to be so; but what are you doing for Him? I do not think there are many members of my own church of whom I have cause to complain, but there may be some. Perhaps you have been converted for years, yet you do not know that you were ever the means of bringing a soul to Jesus. You say that you love the Saviour, but what are you doing for Him? It is not doing anything for Him merely to come here, on Sabbath-days or week-nights, to listen to His Word; there are other and better ways of showing your love to the Saviour than by simply coming to hear another man talk to you about Him. Oh, if I have one idle member in the church, who talks of loving Christ, but does nothing for Him, I would look that member in the face if I knew which one it was, and I would say that faith without works is dead, that the love which does not show itself in practical piety is a pretended love, a painted flame, and not the gift of heaven!

I feel that I must also say that if we are all doing something for Christ, we are none of us doing enough for Him. I feel, sometimes, brethren, as if I wished that I had a thousand tongues with which to tell the story of His grace; — and as if I longed that each day were a year, and each year a century, in which I could keep on telling of His love. Often, when the sermon is over, I chide myself because I seem to have spoken so coldly of the theme that demands a tongue of fire; I have painted so badly that lovely face, which, if you could but see it, would so captivate your hearts that

you would never want to see aught besides. Yet I can honestly say, from my very heart, that I do desire to give my Lord and Master His thousand pieces of silver.

***“I’ll praise my Maker with my breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers.”***

I cannot stop preaching, brethren; and you cannot cease praying; we cannot any of us, if we truly love our Lord, give up working for Him. I am sure that, if we should live to be so very old, and so very feeble, that we could hardly get outside our own door, we would still try to serve Him to the very last; we would find some means of praising Him even on our dying bed.

Now I will conclude with a few remarks upon the last words of the text: “and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred,” which means that *the keepers of the vineyard are to receive a reward*. Christ’s ministers are to receive the love, and regard, and esteem of His people for His sake. Joseph Irons put this thought very prettily; I forget his exact words, but they are to the effect that Christ’s ministers really do get their two hundred. They have one hundred while they are preaching, in their own enjoyment of the sweetness of the mystery which they open up to others; and then they have another hundred in the success of their ministry, — in the joy of seeing sinners saved, harlots reclaimed, and drunkards converted. Our Master is a blessed Paymaster, for He pays us while we are doing his work, in the work itself; He pays us when the work is done, and then He says that He has only begun to pay us; for, when the whole of our work here is over, we shall enter into His joy, and receive the fullness of our reward.

I may, perhaps, have some members of country churches present, who are not kind to their minister. I can speak plainly upon this point, because my people are almost too kind to me; but I say to members of other churches, — Take care of your minister, for you will never get a blessing unless you are kind to him whom God has set over you. If your minister does not have his two hundred, — that is, if he has not your love and respect, and if you do not give him sufficient to keep him above want, — you cannot expect the Spirit of God to work with you. I believe there are scores of churches in which no good is ever done, for this very reason. God says, “You starve my minister, so I will starve you. You find fault with him, and quarrel with him; then I will find fault with you, and quarrel with you. There shall be no blessing upon you; you shall be like Gilboa, there shall be neither dew nor rain upon you.” I sometimes hear sad stories of what is done in some churches to the minister of Christ; He is looked upon as the drudge and slave of the community. Some self-important, pompous man lords it over both pastor and people; and that poor man, even when he is preaching the everlasting gospel, often has to wonder how he will

get his next coat, in which he is to appear in the pulpit. The one he has is nearly out at elbows; but, if he were to hint that another is needed, he would receive notice to go elsewhere. They would tell him that he was a mere hireling, looking for loaves and fishes; — as if there were either loaves or fishes to be got out of such people as they are. I have often heard it remarked that the minister has a certain sum paid to him; but the great mass of the people never think, ‘He is our pastor, we must try to cheer his heart, and make glad his spirit.’ This state of things ought to be altered; and, until it is, the Lord will have a quarrel with those who act thus.

I will say no more upon that point, but repeat that our great Solomon must have His thousand. The minister will cry, even though he is himself starving, “Solomon must have His thousand.” I was once travelling through Hertfordshire, and stayed the night at a certain place, and the minister said to me, “Will you preach here this evening, sir?” “Yes,” I replied, “I should like an opportunity of talking to your people if you will give them notice.” I went into the minister’s house, and I found that they only gave him thirteen shillings a week, and I saw that his coat was threadbare. When I went into the pulpit, I thought, ‘I will just give these people something;’ and I *did*, too, I can assure you. And after that, I gave *him* something, and they gave him something, and we just managed to contribute together enough to get him a new suit of livery, as he called it; and I do not think that brother has been quite as low down in the depths of poverty as he was then. There are scores of places in the country where ministers are treated as that poor man was, but it ought not to be so. The minister of Christ must have some regard, some esteem, some honour in his church; but, after all, our Lord Jesus Christ must have His thousand.

My own people may take home to themselves the first part of my discourse, but you big farmer deacons must take the latter part to yourselves. Don’t you go to sleep tonight until you have thought, ‘What can we do for that poor dear man who is to preach for us next Sunday?’ As for my own members, you can think about the first part. Let it be your joy to know that the vineyard is Christ’s vineyard, and that it ever lies before Him; and let each one of you seek to give to Jesus His thousand pieces of silver,— all the honour, and the glory, and the praise, and the love, and the service that you can render to Him from the beginning of the year to the end thereof.

Amen

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