

THE APPLE TREE IN THE WOODS

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*“As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my Beloved among the sons.”
 Song of Solomon 2:3.*

BY the apple tree would probably be intended by the oriental writer either the citron, or the pomegranate, or the orange. I suppose he did not refer to the apple tree of our gardens, for it would scarcely be known to him. The word would not, however, be properly rendered if we confined it to any of the three fruit trees we have mentioned, or if we excluded our own apple from it, for the term *apple* comprehends all large round fruit not enclosed in a shell. And so we may, without making any mistake, think of the apple tree of our own English orchards and the metaphor will stand good, except that the shadow of our apple tree at home is hardly so excellent a retreat from the sun as the shadow of the other trees included under the term.

Our own apple tree will suffice us, however, and we shall not need to enter into any minute distinctions, or to carry you away to Palestine. We can sit at home in England and can say with great propriety, if we love the Lord Jesus Christ, “As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my Beloved among the sons.” The point of the metaphor is this. There are many trees of the forest and they all have their uses, but when one is hungry, faint and thirsty, the forest trees yield no succor, and we must look elsewhere. They yield shelter, but not refreshing nutriment. If, however, in the midst of the woods one discovers an apple tree, he there finds the refreshment which he needs, his thirst is alleviated and his hunger removed.

Even so the Church here means to say that there are many things in the world which yield us a kind of satisfaction—many men, many truths, many institutions, many earthly comforts—but there are none which yield us the full solace which the soul requires. There are none which can give to the heart the spiritual food for which it hungers. Jesus Christ, alone, supplies the needs of the sons of men. As the apple tree is the exception to the forest trees in bearing its fruit. As it stands on that account in contrast to the trees of the woods, so does Jesus our Beloved contrast with all others and transcendently excel them—

*“An apple tree in simple beauty stands,
 And waves its juicy treasure gracefully,
 Among the barren trees which eroded the woods,
 Of lofty form, but destitute of fruit.
 So Jesus, ‘midst the failing sons of men
 Bears for my use the fruits of covenant love,
 And fills my heart with rare delight and rest.”*

Wandering, as I have been, during the last few days, up and down in the New Forest, the only real forest of our country, and finding rest in its vast solitudes, often has this text occurred to me and therefore I can do no other than speak of it to you—“As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my Beloved among the sons.” We shall at the outset speak of the tree which the fainting soul most desires. We shall then remark that it is no small wonder that the needy one finds an apple tree in so singular a position. And, thirdly, we shall note her very natural conduct when she found so desirable a tree in such a position—she sat down under its shadow with great delight and feasted upon the delicious fruit.

I. First, then, our text speaks of THE TREE WHICH THE FAINTING SOUL MOST DESIRES. Imagine yourself upon some sultry day in autumn as a wanderer in the leafy lanes of a great forest. The grand cathedral aisles reach before you to lengths immeasurable, or huge domes of foliage rise above you like a second sky. Imagine yourself roaming amidst the ferns and brakes, trampling on the briars and hollies, or sitting down on mossy banks and knolls soft with layers of

leaves. Suppose, also, that you are hungry and thirsty and that no rippling streams offer their cooling floods while you are so far away from human ears that, hungry though you might be even to death, there would be no eyes to see you and consequently no hands outstretched for your help.

In such a plight it needs no imagination to conceive you as glancing to the trees, your only companions, and silently appealing to them for aid. Some of them look as if their bowing branches would sympathize if they could, others grotesquely grin at you and the most of them sternly refuse you succor by their solemn silence. You will ask in vain of oak, or ash, or elm. Suppose you appeal to yonder stately tree which is the greatest of them all, the king of the forest, unequalled in greatness or girth? Admire its stupendous limbs, its gnarled roots, its bossy bark, the vast area beneath its boughs. You look up at it and think what a puny creature you are and how brief has been your life compared with its duration. You try to contemplate the storms which have swept over it and the suns which have shone upon it.

Great, however, as it is, it cannot help you. If it were a thousand times higher and its topmost boughs swept the stars, yet it could minister no aid to you. This is a fit picture of the attempt to find consolation in systems of religion which are recommended to you because they are greatly followed. Here is a religion which has been patronized by kings and nobles for centuries—a religion which has the support of the great and fashionable at the present hour—will not this content you? Is it not enough to belong to the same religion as the majority, especially when that majority includes the aristocrats of the land? Is not the religion of the people the voice of God? What more do you need? Why should you be singular?

Alas, the great tree is not the fruit-bearing tree. The true Christian, believing in Jesus Christ with all his heart, counts it no desirable thing to be found in the broad road where the many go, for he remembers that his Master spoke of it as leading to destruction. Majorities are nothing to him, for he remembers that, “strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it.” He does not reckon that the greatness of the company will make right wrong, or overawe the Judge of All, or make eternal punishment one whit the less intolerable. We desire not the way of the multitude—the way of the Crucified we delight to follow. It is not the mightiest tree of the forest that we look to with hope, but to the Lord Jesus, our Beloved, who is the apple tree among the trees of the woods!

His fruit is sweet to our taste. He is the way, the truth, and the life to us. His Person is most dear to us and His teachings are the food of our spirits. Happy are you who dare to be singular with Christ! Blessed are you who have found the narrow way which leads unto eternal life! Blessed are you because you are not carried away with the strong current and fashion of the age, but have heard the voice that says, “Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Wisdom tells the hungry man to prefer the solitary apple tree to whole groves of the largest oaks or beeches. And wisdom given from above has brought you, O Believer in Jesus, to prefer your Redeemer to all the great ones of the earth.

Suppose that in your wanderings to and fro you come upon another tree which is said to be the oldest in the forest. We, all of us, have a veneration for age. Antiquity has many charms. I scarcely know if antiquity and novelty should run a race for popular favor, which might win. Nowadays we are pestered by a class of men who would gladly fascinate our nation to error by the charms of antiquity. They will tell us that a certain ceremony, though no trace of it is to be found in Scripture, must be venerable because practiced in the fourth century. And they imagine that worship in buildings which were founded by Saxons and garnished by Normans must be peculiarly acceptable with God! To be ancient—is it not a great advantage? As cleanliness is next to godliness, surely antiquity must be next to orthodoxy!

Yet if there is no Scripture to warrant it, an ancient ceremony is only an ancient farce! There are some things which are so old as to be rotten, eaten of worms and fit only to be put away. Many things called ancient are but clever counterfeits, or when they are true they are but the bones and caresses of that which once was good when life filled it with energy and power. There is an “old way which wicked men have trod,” as well as a good old way in which the righteous walk. We cannot be certain that a thing is right because it is old, for Satan is old, and sin is old, and death is old, and Hell is old—yet none of these things are right and desirable on that account.

No, Jesus Christ our Lord, since the day in which we have known Him by faith, has quieted our conscience, has calmed our fears, has given us joy and peace through believing. And we are not to be seduced from Him by all the antiquated falsehoods which may weave their spells around us. Old even to decay may be the trees in which other travelers delight, but as for us, we choose the tree of heavenly fruit—the apple tree is our choice, Jesus is our Beloved.

Ritualists may glory in their fourth century doctrines, their fathers, their councils and their ancient customs. The Bible is primitive enough for us! The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is venerable enough for us! We are content with Him and need no more. To us the main thing is to find food for our *souls*, the bread that never perishes, the fruit which will quench our desperate thirst. We have found it in the Savior and from the Savior we will not depart.

It may be that in the midst of the forest, while you are hungry and thirsty, you come upon a strangely beautiful tree. Its proportions are exact and as you gaze upon it from a distance you exclaim—“How wonderful are the works of God!” And you begin to think of those trees of the Lord which are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He has planted. You stand under it and look up among the majestic boughs and the spreading branches and you again admire the beauty of Nature as it comes from the hand of the Most High. But beauty can never satisfy hunger and when a man is dying of thirst it is vain to talk to him of symmetry and taste. He needs food. This reminds us that nowadays there are some who try to satisfy the souls of men with beauty. Look at their processions—who would not be charmed with their varied costumes, their spangled banners, their gilded crosses and their melodious hymns?

Listen to their choir—is not the singing perfection? If you want a concert on Sunday and do not like to attend a theater, you can find it in the cathedral and in many a parish Church. If you want to have your senses gratified and cannot conscientiously attend an opera on Sunday, you can have ears and eyes gratified at Church, yes and the nose as well in some places—and these amusements they mistake for religious exercises! Compared with the plainness of worship which we follow, our casting out of everything like symbol, our abhorrence of everything that would take away the mind from God Himself and fix it upon secondary objects—compared with all this their worship is enchanting, indeed, to the carnal mind—and we do not wonder that those who are led by taste should follow after it.

But oh, if a man once hungers after the bread of Heaven, his taste for finery will be reduced to a very secondary position as a governing power of his mind. If once the soul craves after God, after peace, pardon, Truth, reconciliation, holiness—it will seek the Lord Jesus, the Apple Tree—and forget the other trees, however shapely they may be. “These bear no fruit for me,” says the hungry soul. The awakened conscience listens to the chant as it is echoed among the massive pillars and watches the smoke as it rises like a cloud among the arches of the roof, and he cries, “What are chants and smoke to me? I need a Savior!” He sees the procession and after he has gazed upon it he says, “What are these mummeries to me? I need washing in the blood of Christ.”

As the incense smokes to Heaven he says to himself, “O for the incense of the Savior’s merit! What are these gums of Araby to me if they should burn all day long?” He turns away, sick and faint in heart, from all the gew-gaws and outward trappings of modern Popery and he cries, “O God, You are a Spirit, and they that worship You must worship You in spirit and in truth. I need You, O my God! I need spiritual life within myself that I may commune with You! And where can I find it but in my Savior? He gives it to me! He is the only fruit-bearing tree among the trees of the woods.”

We will pursue our investigations in the forest and while we are doing so we shall come upon some very wonderful trees. I have seen, just lately, instances in which branches are curiously interlaced with one another. The beech sends forth a long drooping bough and lest it should not be able to support itself, another bough strikes up from below to buttress it, or descends from above and clasps it and the boughs actually grow into one another. Strange things may be observed in the undisturbed woods which are not to be seen in our hedgerow trees, or discerned in our gardens. Trees have odd habits of their own and grow marvelously if left to their own sweet wills.

I have stood under them and said, “How can this be? This is singular, indeed! How could they grow like this? What wondrous interlacing, intertwining, gnarling and knotting!” Yes, but if a man were hungry and thirsty, he would not be satisfied with curiosities. So is it with some preaching that I know of. If you regard it from the standpoint of literary excellence you confess that it is wonderful. There are great orators and deep thinkers to be found to whom I would not presume to hold a candle—whose performances are really wonderful. I have felt, after I have heard their essays, like the Primitive Methodist who went to dinner with the squire and then pronounced the blessing afterwards—“Lord, we thank you that we do not have such a good dinner as this every day, for it is too rich to agree with us.” I have felt just like that after hearing the fine oration, though, mark you, I did not remember a bit of it after it was over and my *heart* was none the better.

How many sermons are published nowadays, as well as preached, which are full of what is called thought? By the cant word, “thought,” is generally meant contradicting the plain meaning of Scripture and starting new notions. A man

who preaches plainly what God reveals is said to be an echo of the Puritans, a dealer in platitudes, a repeater at second-hand or exploded dogmas. But to find out some new lie every week to tell your people, to shake their faith in Inspiration every time you open your mouth—and make them believe that there is nothing certain, but that everything is a mere matter of opinion—that is “thought and culture” in these days. And there are in certain dissenting pulpits the most miserable specimens of this school and in the pews a number of their silly admirers.

Brothers and Sisters, some of us are too old-fashioned ever to be led astray in that way, and what is more, we have such an awful appetite—we are possessed of such a dreadful hunger, and such insatiable thirst that we dare not go away from the Apple Tree—because we need to be always eating. We dare not go away from Jesus Christ, because we are always needing pardon, always needing peace, always needing fresh life. And provided we can retain our hold on Jesus we are not particular about the way in which some of these wonderful trees twist their boughs. We do not feel concerned about the marvels of modern thought, or the resurrection of ancient errors—

*“Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault my soul with treacherous art,
I’d call them vanities and lies,
And bind the Gospel to my heart.
For if we search the globe around,
Yes, search from Britain to Japan,
There shall be no religion found,
So just to God, so safe to man.”*

But as we are wandering in the forest and are still hungry I hear someone saying, “Ah, here is the place for food. You need not boast of your Apple Tree—the ground is covered with meat beneath this noble tree.” I look up—it is autumn time—and I see a huge tree loaded with beech nuts which fall from it like rain. “Here is the place for food.” Was that a human voice I heard? No, it was the grunts of a herd of swine! See how content they are—how happy—how they are munching the meat as it falls from the trees. Yonder is a grove of oaks, all shedding their acorns—and how delighted the swine are! How they fatten upon the spoil! “Will you not come here?” they seem to say, as they munch in comfort! “Will you not come here? Do not tell us about trees which bear no fruit—there is surely fruit enough here.”

Even thus I hear a voice from the Exchange—“Here are the trees which bear us golden apples! Come here and be filled.” I hear it from those who cater to public amusements—“Here are the fruits which can delight the soul! Here is the place to spend a happy day.” And so I hear it from the gay followers of vice—“This dalliance, this dance, this flowing bowl, this sweet-sounding viol, these are real joys.” Yes, to you, to you who choose them! Beech nuts and acorns are good enough for swine. To you who can find comfort, solid comfort, in the gain of merchandise, or in the pleasures of sin, or in the delights of pomp, these things are good enough! But a man, a God-made man, a man into whom God has put a new heart—not a swine’s heart, but a *man’s* heart—needs apples, not acorns—needs *spiritual* food!

He needs food for an immortal Nature and there is no such food to be found short of the Lord Jesus Christ, for He, and He only, is the Apple Tree among the trees of the woods! I might enlarge, but I will not. I will simply say what every child of God here knows that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us, ever since we found Him, everything we have needed. When we came to Him we were worn out with faintness, we were hungry to get rid of our sins, but we are now rid of them, every one of them. We went up to His Cross and as we saw Him hanging on it, the strings which bound our burden to our shoulders began to crack. Our load rolled off into His sepulcher and we have never seen it since. We have half fancied we have felt it again, but we never have, for if our sins are searched for they cannot be found! No, they shall not be, says the Lord.

You remember when you first came to that precious tree where the Savior died? There you discovered that your sin was blotted out and that you were accepted in the Beloved. And there you were made to be forevermore an heir of Heaven! Oh, the lusciousness of the fruit which you tasted, then! Oh, the delightful quiet of that shadow under which you sat that day! Blessed be His name! You had searched among the other trees, but you found no fruit there. You tried to rest in the shadow of other boughs, but you never rested till on that blood-stained tree of the Cross you saw your sins put away and your salvation secured! And then you rested and were satisfied. But the Lord Jesus Christ has not only satisfied us as to the past, see what He has done for us as to the present!

My dear Hearers, there are some of you who have never known, yet, what it is to be perfectly happy. I do not call it being perfectly happy to be full of excitement, laughter and apparent joy—and then to go home in the evening and sit down and feel disgusted with it all. That is the froth of fancy and not the true wine of joy. But to be perfectly happy is to be able to think about all things on earth and all things in Heaven, and yet to say, “I lack nothing! There is nothing I desire, nothing I pine after! I am saved! I am a child of God—the eternal God is my own Father! I am on my way to His own glorious house. If death should strike me now it would not matter, or if I am spared for another 50 years it will make no difference to me, for all is well and could not be better! If there are crosses in my lot, they are God-sent crosses. If I have troubles, they work my lasting good. If I lose, I am a gainer by my losses. If I have all things, I see God in all things. And if I have nothing, yet I see all things in my God. Nothing more can I desire. Christ is all and Christ is mine and, therefore, I have all things.”

Now, that is the position of the Christian this day. He sits down under the shadow of Christ and Christ’s fruit is sweet to him. Let me ask you, can you imagine any other place where such peace of mind or such happiness can be enjoyed? Why, I know sick people who are far more happy in their sickness than worldlings are in their health! And I know poor men who are infinitely more at peace and more content than rich men who have not the Savior. Jesus Christ, alone, satisfies us for the past and delights us for the present. And then as to the future. The man who has found Christ looks forward to it not merely with complacency, not simply without a dread, but with a joyous expectancy and hope! Those things which make others tremble make us glad.

There is such a thing as dying—thank God, there is! Who wants to live here always? That narrow stream which separates this country from the better land must be forded by each of us. Who would have it otherwise? Instead of being afraid to cross it, we have sometimes said—

*“O Lord of Hosts, divide the waves,
And land us now in Heaven.”*

The judgment? The Christian quails not at the thought. Who shall lay anything to his charge? The coming of the Lord? The Believer fears it not, no, it is his grandest hope! Eternity and its never-ending cycles? He dreads it not, for it is to him the climax of his joy that it is to be everlasting. O, happy people who have Christ! Happy souls who rest in Jesus! They may say what none others can—“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons.”

Dear Hearer, is He your Beloved? Can you claim Him as your own? If you can, then I am sure you will bear witness, as the text does, to the satisfying power of the Savior and declare with Ralph Erskine—

*“What fool soever disagrees,
My sweet experience proves
That Jesus is the tree of trees
Among a thousand groves.”*

II. The spouse spoke of the tree which she most desired—THE WONDER WAS THAT SHE FOUND IT. It was an apple tree, but it was not in a garden, a fruit tree but not in a vineyard—it was “among the trees of the woods.” Who would know of so great a rarity as an apple tree in a forest if he were not first told of it? So Jesus Christ, at this present day, is not known to all mankind. It is a most unhappy thought that probably the majority of the human race have not heard of the Savior at all—and a very large proportion have never heard of Him except through misrepresentations. Only a small minority of our fellow men know anything about the Savior—

*“What millions never knew the Lord!
What millions hate Him when He’s known.”*

Even in our own country you will not find it a difficult thing to meet with persons who are totally ignorant of Christ. Try it and you shall find in country towns and in hamlets men grown up who could not give you an answer to this question—“How is it that the death of Jesus saves the soul?” No, they do not even know the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners! “Well,” you say, “we know the rural districts are ignorant.” Yes, but they are far superior in light to parts of London. You can readily find children in our streets, and what is worse, artisans in our workshops, to whom the bare name of Jesus may be known, but anything like the doctrine of His substitutionary Atonement is a thing of which they have not heard.

Living in the light they abide in darkness! Amid a thousand lamps they see not. One of the problems which may most surprise us is the existence of such dense ignorance in persons who live in intimate connection with instructed people. If

you want the grossest ignorance, probably you would not find it in Pekin or Timbuktu, but in London or New York. Where the greatest light is, there the shadows are deepest. Men nearest to the Church are often furthest from God. You cannot easily find an apple tree in a great forest. If you were put down in the middle of a forest and told there was an apple tree there, you might wander for many a day before you discovered it—and often go over your own footsteps, lost in endless mazes—and you may not find the object of your search.

And so, though there is a Savior, men have not found the Savior—and there may even be souls here present who long for that which Jesus is able to give and yet have not discovered Him. You know all about Him in the letter of His Word but you cannot find Him *spiritually*. And I hear you cry, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him.” I know I am speaking to some such. You have been going up and down for months with your prayers and your tears and your good works. You have been trying to do all you can to save yourselves, but you find your own actions to be barren trees and you know that there is an apple tree somewhere, but you cannot find it. Ah, poor Soul, you are like the Ethiopian eunuch, when he was asked if he understood what he read, he gave the answer, “How can I, unless some man should guide me?”

Do you not wonder that the spouse found her apple tree among the trees of the woods? The fact is, none ever find it except they are *led* there! And none can lead a soul to that Apple Tree but the eternal Spirit of God. He can make use of His ministers and He does. And therefore, Brothers in the ministry, let us always be preaching about this Apple Tree. Let us preach up Jesus Christ, let us make tracks to the Tree of Life! Whatever we do *not* preach, let us preach Jesus Christ! I have found, wherever I have been during the last month, that though there might not be a road to this place or that, there was sure to be a London road.

Now, if your sermon does not happen to have the doctrine of Election, or the doctrine of Final Perseverance in it, let it always have Christ in it. Have a road to London, a road to Christ, in every sermon. Still, the most plain preaching will require the Spirit of God to go with it, or else the soul will hear about this glorious tree and about the sweetness of the fruit, but will never find the shadow—and will never eat the dainty apples. Have you come to Christ, dear Brothers and Sisters? Then give God the glory for it! Jesus led you. His Spirit guided you. Praise and bless His holy name. Now, is it not a strange place for an apple tree to be found in—in a forest? We seldom hear of such a thing. An apple tree should grow in a garden. How should it be found in a forest?

And is it not a strange thing that a Savior should be found for us among men—not among angels? You shall search for a Savior among “the helmed cherubim and worded seraphim” as long as you will, but there is none there. The Savior is found in a manger at Bethlehem, in a carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. Among the poor and needy is He seen while He sojourns among the sons of men. As I was turning this text over in my mind, I thought, “Ah, and what strange trees this tree grew among, for there it stands with a gallows tree on either side, and two thieves hanging upon them. “He was numbered with the transgressors.”—

*“Not among you, O you cedars,
Not among you, O mighty oaks,
But among the bushes of the desert,
Among the trees accursed was Jesus found!”*

“He made His grave with the wicked.”—

*“As in some sere and unproductive wood
One lovely, fruit-producing apple tree,
Bright contrast to the ruined thousands round;
So in this populous but vicious world
O You Desire of nations, did You stand.”*

Now, there is something very sweet about this, because a forest is the very place where we most love to find Christ growing. If I had come, the other day, upon an apple tree in the forest and it had happened to be the time of ripe fruit, I should have felt no compunction of conscience in taking whatever I was able to reach, for a tree growing in the forest is free to all comers. Should there be a hungry one beneath its bough, he need not say, “May I?” when his mouth waters at the golden fruit! He need not say, “It would be stealing. I am unfit to take it. I am unworthy of it.” Man, if there is an apple tree in the forest, no man can keep it for himself or deny your right to it, for each wanderer has a right to what

fruit he can gather! The animals have rights of pasturage. And the birds have rights of nesting. And you have rights of feeding. Pluck away, Man, and eat to your full!

The shadows and the fruits of forest trees are free to all who need them. This ought to delight any seeking soul here this morning. Jesus Christ is not hedged about in the Scriptures, as some theologians would desire to guard Him from coming souls. The Lord has planted no protection of thorns and hollies by saying, “You must bring with you preparations for Grace. You must *feel* this and feel the other, and only *then* may you dare to come to Christ.” It is a gross error to tell a man to do something and be something before he believes in Jesus. No! There He stands with no hedge about Him and whoever will, may partake freely! If you hear the Gospel call, your reply to it should be—

*“Just as I am, Your love unknown
Has broken every barrier down.
Now to rely on You alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.”*

Christ has no barriers around Him to keep you from Him. If there are any they are of your own making—

*“None are excluded but those
Who themselves exclude
Welcome the learned and polite,
The ignorant and rude.”*

Whoever shall come shall be welcome to this priceless Apple Tree! There is some comfort, therefore, in thinking that He grows among the trees of the woods.

III. It was little wonder that when the spouse, all hungry and faint, did come upon this apple tree in the forest SHE ACTED AS SHE DID. Straightway she sat down under its shadow with great delight. And its fruit was sweet unto her taste. She looked up at it—that was the first thing she did and she perceived that it met her double need. The sun was hot, there was the shadow. She was faint, there was the fruit. Now, see how Jesus meets all the needs of all who come to Him? God’s anger, like the hot noon-day sun, falls on me—how can I escape it? There is no escape from the anger of God except by an Interposer.

What is a shadow? Is it not caused by the interposition of the bough, or the rock, or whatever it may be which comes between us and the sun? If we sit under a tree in the shadow, it is because the tree receives the heat and so we escape from it. Jesus Christ’s great office is the Interposer, the Mediator, the Substitute, the Atonement, the Sacrifice—and when we hide beneath Him we are screened. God’s wrath cannot come on us because it has come upon Him on our behalf—

*“When Christ my Screen is interposed
Between the sun and me
My joyful heart and lips unclosed,
Adore the glorious Tree.”*

That is a beautiful picture in Solomon’s Song where the king is said to ride in his chariot of love. He takes his spouse with him and they ride together in his palanquin, and it has over it a canopy. Did you ever notice what it is made of? It is said, “The covering thereof was of purple,” for truly the only interposition between us and the sun of God’s wrath is the purple canopy of the atoning blood! Is it not delightful to sit down beneath the scarlet canopy of the Savior’s blood and feel, “God cannot smite me—He has smitten His Son. He cannot demand payment a second time. If Jesus suffered in my place, how can God make *me* suffer, again, for my sin? Where were the justice of the Most High to punish an Immaculate Substitute and then punish men for whom that Substitute endured His wrath?” This is the cool, calm, holy shadow under which we abide!

But then, the spouse also found that she was thirsty and that the fruit of the tree exactly met her case. Our inner life needs sustenance and food. Now, in the Lord Jesus is life and the bread of life. He is that Bread which came down from Heaven, of which if a man eats he shall live forever. O, to get a heart full of Christ, to get a whole Christ into one’s inmost soul, to have Him abide in you—this is bliss! Then your soul feels, “It is enough—I have all things, for I have Jesus.” Let us, therefore, seek at this time, and especially this afternoon in our meditations—and when we come to the communion table this evening—to abide under the shadow of Jesus and there to be found abundantly eating of His fruit.

One thing more is to be noted—the spouse, when she had begun to enjoy the provision and the shade, and had sat down under it as if she intended to say, “I never mean to leave this place. In this delicious shadow I mean to repose

forever,” then she also began to tell of it to others. In the text she describes Christ as the Apple Tree and gives her reason for so calling Him—“I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste.” Experience must be the ground upon which we found our descriptions. If a preacher wants to preach with power, let him tell what he has felt, tasted and handled. It is of little use to say Christ is precious, unless you can add, “I have found Him so.” Therefore the Church brings in her own experience—“Sweet shade! I there sat down as one at home and there regaled my soul with most delicious fare.”

She could not hold her tongue about her Beloved! She must speak! She could not retain the secret of this Apple Tree and say to herself, “Others may go to it, and so perhaps when I go another time there may be nothing left for myself.” No, she spread the news. She set it down in black and white in the Inspired Volume for an everlasting testimony that there is an Apple Tree among the trees of the woods of which she had eaten—so that others might eat of it, too—and enjoy the same sweetness for themselves. This morning every renewed heart desires that every other heart should know the Savior. I can speak well of my Lord and Master. I do not know that I can say anything better of Him than most of His people can, for the experience of the saints is much alike. But I can say this, if there is happiness beneath the sky, Jesus can give it to you! If there is peace and rest to a jaded soul, Jesus can give it you!

If there is a delight, a brimming delight, an overflowing delight, if there is that which can make the eyes sparkle and the pulse to beat right merrily—and the blood to leap in the veins—it is when Jesus Christ is consciously ours and we are resting in Him. I am sure, if there were an apple tree in any forest and it were once found out, everybody would be taken to see it, it would be such an attraction! There would be many paths to it and everybody who had been in the forest and seen it would tell his neighbors. Now, I beseech you, who have found the Savior, to be telling others what you know about Him and try to lead others to look at Him. You cannot make them feed upon Him, but God can, and if you can lead them to the Tree, who knows but God will give them spiritual hunger and will lead them to feed as you have fed.

O you silent Christians, you silent Christians, who neither by your tongue, nor your pen, nor by any other way, ever tell about Christ, I do not know what to make of you! I wonder the seats you sit on do not push you off and speak instead of you, and that the stones of the street do not cry out against you as you pass over them. Why, what can you be made of, to be saved from going down to Hell and not want others to be saved, too? Shame on you! Shame on me, also, whenever I am silent about such a blessed salvation, such a Divine redemption. I would gladly set your tongues going about this blessed Apple Tree among the trees of the woods!

There is nothing about which you can speak so freely without fear of exaggeration. All the world has been talking about the Shah of Persia. I wish they would talk half as much about the Christ of God! All the good you will ever get out of the Shah you may see with your eyes shut. But the benefit that will come from the King of Heaven to your own souls and ten thousands of other souls is unlimited! Cry the Savior up, Beloved! Set Him on a high throne! Give Him the best of your thoughts, the best of your words, the best of your actions! Give Him of your time and your substance. He deserves to have honor above all the sons of men, for He is the best of all.

As the apple tree to the hungry man excels all other trees, so does Jesus excel all other loves. Let us give Him, today, our hearts’ warmest love and praise Him forever and forever. God grant it, for His name’s sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 23. Isaiah 12.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.