

SATAN'S BANQUET

“The governor of the feast called the bridegroom and said unto him, every man at the beginning does set forth good wine. And when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

John 2:9, 10

THE governor of the feast said more than he intended to say, or rather, there is more truth in what he said than he himself imagined. This is the established rule all the world over—“the good wine first and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse.” It is the rule with men and have not hundreds of disappointed hearts bewailed it? Friendship first—the oily tongue, the words softer than butter and afterwards the drawn sword. Ahithophel first presents the lordly dish of love and kindness to David, then afterwards that which is worse, for he forsakes his master and becomes the counselor of his rebel son. Judas presents first of all the dish of fair speech and of kindness, the Savior partook thereof, he walked to the House of God in company with Him and took sweet counsel with Him. But afterwards there came the dregs of the wine—“He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.” Judas the thief betrayed his Master, bringing forth afterwards “that which is worse.”

You have found it so with many whom you thought your friends. In the heyday of prosperity, when the sun was shining and the birds were singing and all was fair and gay and cheerful with you, they brought forth the good wine. But there came a chilling frost and nipped your flowers and the leaves fell from the trees and your streams were frosted with the ice—and then they brought forth that which is worse—they forsook you and fled. They left you in your hour of peril and taught you that great truth, that “Cursed is he that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm.” And this is the way all the world over—I say it once again—not merely with men, but with nature, too—

*“Alas, for us, if you were all,
And nothing beyond O earth,”*

for does not this world serve us just the same? In our youth it brings forth the best wine. Then we have the sparkling eye and the ear attuned to music. Then the blood flows swiftly through the veins and the pulse beats joyously.

But wait a little and there shall come forth afterwards that which is worse, for the keepers of the house shall tremble and the strong men shall bow themselves. The grinders shall fail because they are few, they that look out of the windows shall be darkened, all the daughters of music shall be brought low. Then shall the strong man totter—the grasshopper shall be a burden and desire shall fail—the mourners shall go about the streets. First there is the flowing cup of youth and afterwards the stagnant waters of old age, unless God shall cast into those dregs a fresh flood of His loving kindness and tender mercy, so that once again, as it always happens to the Christian, the cup shall run over and again sparkle with delight. O Christian, trust not in men, rely not upon the things of this present time, for this is evermore the rule with men and with the world—“the good wine first and when we have well drunk, then that which is worse.”

This morning, however, I am about to introduce you to two houses of feasting. First, I shall bid you look within the doors of the devil's house and you will find he is true to this rule. He brings forth first the good wine and when men have well drunk and their brains are muddled therewith, then he brings forth that which is worse. Having bid you look there and tremble and take heed to the warning, I shall then attempt to enter with you into the banqueting house of our Beloved Lord and Master Jesus Christ and of Him we shall be able to say, as the governor of the feast said to the

bridegroom, "You have kept the good wine until now." Your feasts grow better and not worse—Your wines grow richer, Your viands are daintier far and Your gifts more precious than before. "You have kept the good wine until now."

1. First, we are to take a warning glance at the HOUSE OF FEASTING WHICH SATAN HAS BUILT—for as wisdom has built her house and hewn out her seven pillars, so has folly its temple and its tavern of feasting, into which it continually tempts the unwary. Look within the banqueting house and I will show you four tables and the guests that sit there and as you look at those tables you shall see the courses brought in. You shall see the wine cups brought and you shall see them vanish one after another and you shall mark that the rule holds good at all four tables—first the good wine and afterwards that which is worse—yes, I shall go further—afterwards, that which is worst of all.

At the first table to which I shall invite your attention, though I beseech you never to sit down and drink there, sits the PROFLIGATE. The table of the profligate is a gay table. It is covered over with a gaudy crimson and all the vessels upon it look exceedingly bright and glistening. Many there are that sit there. But they know not that they are the guests of Hell and that the end of all the feast shall be in the depths of perdition. See now the great governor of the feast, as he comes in? He has a bland smile upon his face. His garments are not black, but he is girded with a robe of many colors. He has a honeyed word on his lip and a tempting witchery in the sparkle of his eye. He brings in the cup and says, "Hey, young man, drink here, it sparkled in the cup, it moves itself aright. Do you see it? It is the wine cup of pleasure."

This is the first cup at the banqueting house of Satan. The young man takes it and sips the liquor. At first it is a cautious sip. It is but a little he will take and then he will restrain himself. He does not intend to indulge much in lust, he means not to plunge headlong into perdition. There is a flower there on the edge of that cliff—he will reach forward a little and pluck it, but it is not his intention to dash himself from that beetling crag and destroy himself. Not he! He thinks it easy to put away the cup when he has tested its flavor! He has no design to abandon himself to its intoxication. He takes a shallow draught. But O, how sweet it is! How it makes his blood tingle within him. What a fool I was not to have tasted this before! he thinks. Was ever joy like this? Could it be thought that bodies could be capable of such ecstasy as this? He drinks again. This time he takes a deeper draught and the wine is hot in his veins.

Oh, how blest he thinks he is! What would he not say now in the praise of Bacchus, or Venus, or whatever shape Beelzebub chooses to assume? He becomes a very orator in praise of sin! It is fair, it is pleasant, the deep damnation of lust appears as joyous as the transports of Heaven. He drinks, he drinks, he drinks again, till his brain begins to reel with the intoxication of his sinful delight. This is the first course. Drink, O you drunkards of Ephraim and bind the crown of pride about your head and call us fools because we put your cup from us—drink with the harlot and sup with the lustful—you may think yourselves wise for so doing, but we know that after these things there comes something worse, for your vine is of the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah—your grapes are grapes of gall, the clusters are bitter. Your wine is the poison of dragons and the cruel venom of asps.

Now with a leer upon his brow, the subtle governor of the feast rises from his seat. His victim has had enough of the best wine. He takes away that cup and he brings in another, not quite so sparkling. Look into the liquor. It is not beaded over with the sparkling bubbles of rapture. It is all flat and dull and insipid, it is called the cup of satiety. The man has had enough of pleasure and like a dog he vomits, and like a dog he will return to his vomit again. Who has woe? Who has redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. I am now speaking figuratively of wine, as well as literally. The wine of lust brings the same redness of the eyes. The profligate soon discovers that all the rounds of pleasure end in satiety. "What?" says he, "What more can I do? There! I have committed every wickedness that can be imagined and I have drained every cup of pleasure. Give me something fresh! I have tried the theaters all round—there! I don't care so much as one single farthing for them all. I have gone to every kind of pleasure that I can conceive. It is all over. Gaiety itself grows flat and dull. What am I to do?"

And this is the devil's second course—the course of satiety—a fitful drowsiness, the result of the previous excess. Thousands there are who are drinking of the tasteless cup of satiety every day and some novel invention whereby they may kill time, some new discovery whereby they may give a fresh vent to their iniquity would be a wonderful thing to them. And if some man should rise up who could find out for them some new fashion of wickedness—some deeper depths in the deeps of the nethermost Hell of lasciviousness—they would bless his name—for having given them something fresh to excite them. That is the devil's second course. And do you see them partaking of it? There are some of you that are having a deep draught of it this morning. You are the jaded horses of the fiend of lust, the disappointed followers of the will-o-the-wisp of pleasure. God knows, if you were to speak your heart out you would be obliged to say, "There! I have tried pleasure and I do not find it pleasure. I have gone the round and I am just like the blind horse at the mill, I have to go round again. I am spellbound to the sin, but I cannot take delight in it now as I once did, for all the glory of it is as a fading flower and as the hasty fruit before the summer.

And while the feaster remains in the putrid sea of his infatuation, another scene is opening. The governor of the feast commands another liquor to be broached. This time the fiend bears a black goblet and he presents it with eyes full of hellfire, flashing with fierce damnation. "Drink of that, Sir," says he and the man sips it and starts back and shrieks, "O God! That ever I must come to this!" You must drink, Sir! He that quaffs the first cup, must drink the second and the third. Drink, though it is like fire down your throat! Drink it, though it is as the lava of Etna in your bowels! Drink! You must drink! He that sins must suffer. He that is a profligate in his youth must have rottenness in his bones and disease within his loins. He who rebels against the Laws of God must reap the harvest in his own body here.

Oh, there are some dreadful things that I might tell you of this third course. Satan's house has a front chamber full of everything that is enticing to the eye and bewitching to the sensual taste. But there is a back chamber and no one knows, no one has seen the whole of its horrors. There is a secret chamber where he shovels out the creatures whom he has himself destroyed—a chamber beneath whose floor is the blazing of Hell and above whose boards the heat of that horrible pit is felt. It may be a physician's place, rather than mine, to tell of the horrors that some have to suffer as the result of their iniquity.

I leave that. But let me tell the profligate spendthrift that the poverty which he will endure is the result of his sin of extravagance. Let him know, also, that the remorse of conscience that will overtake him is not an accidental thing that drops by chance from Heaven—it is the result of his own iniquity. Depend upon it, Brothers and Sisters, sin carries an infant misery in its bowels and sooner or later it must be delivered of its terrible child. If we sow the seed we must reap the harvest. Thus the law of Hell's house stands—"first, the good wine, then, afterwards, that which is worse."

The last course remains to be presented. And now, you strong men who mock at the warning which I would deliver to you with a brother's voice and with an affectionate heart, though with rough language, come here and drink of this last cup. The sinner has at the end brought himself to the grave. His hopes and joys were like gold put into a bag full of holes and they have all vanished—vanished forever. And now he has come to the last. His sins haunt him, his transgressions perplex him. He is taken like a bull in a net and how shall he escape? He dies and descends from disease to damnation. Shall mortal language attempt to tell you the horrors of that last tremendous cup of which the profligate must drink and drink forever?

Look at it—you cannot see its depths—but cast an eye upon its seething surface. I hear the noise of rushing to and fro and a sound as of gnashing of teeth and the wailing of despairing souls. I look into that cup and I hear a voice coming up from its depths—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Tophet is prepared of old, the pile thereof is wood and much smoke, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it."

And what do you say to this last course of Satan? "Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Profligate! I beseech you, in the name of God, start from this table! Oh, be not so careless at your cups. Be not so asleep, secure in the

peace which you now enjoy! Man, death is at the door and at his heels is swift destruction! As for you, who as yet have been restrained by a careful father and the watchfulness of an anxious mother, I beseech you shun the house of sin and folly. Let the wise man's words be written on your heart and be you mindful of them in the hour of temptation—"Remove your way far from her and come not near the door of her house—for the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb and her mouth is smoother than oil—but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold on Hell."

Do you see that other table yonder in the middle of the palace? Ah, good easy souls! Many of you had thought that you never went to the feast of Hell at all. But there is a table for you, too. It is covered over with a fair white cloth and all the vessels upon the table are most clean and comely. The wine looks not like the wine of Gomorrah, it moves aright, like the wine from the grapes of Eshcol. It seems to have no intoxication in it. It is like the ancient wine which they pressed from the grape into the cup, having in it no deadly poison. Do you see the men who sit at this table? How self-contented they are! Ask the white fiends who wait at it and they will tell you, "This is the table of the self-righteous—the Pharisee sits there. You may know him. He has his phylactery between his eyes. The hem of his garment is made exceeding broad. He is one of the best of the best professors." "Ah," said Satan, as he draws the curtain and shuts off the table where the profligates are carousing, "be quiet, don't make too much noise, lest these sanctimonious hypocrites should guess what company they are in. Those self-righteous people are my guests quite as much as you, and I have them quite as safely."

So Satan, like an angel of light, brings forth a gilded goblet, looking like the chalice of the table of communion. And what wine is that? It seems to be the very wine of the sacred Eucharist. It is called the wine of self-satisfaction and around the brim you may see the bubbles of pride. Look at the swelling froth upon the bowl—"God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." You know that cup, my self-deceiving Hearers. Oh, that you knew the deadly hemlock which is mixed therein. Sin as other men do? Not you—not at all. You are not going to submit yourself to the righteousness of Christ—what need you? You are as good as your neighbors. If you are not saved, you ought to be, you think. Don't you pay everybody twenty-shillings in the pound? Did you ever rob anybody in your life? You do your neighbors a good turn. You are as good as other people.

Very good! That is the first cup the devil gives and the good wine makes you swell with self-important dignity, as its fumes enter your heart and puff it up with an accursed pride. Yes! I see you sitting in the room so cleanly swept and so neatly garnished and I see the crowds of your admirers standing around the table, even many of God's own children, who say, "Oh that I were half as good as he." While the very humility of the righteous provides you with provender for your pride. Wait awhile, you unctuous hypocrite, wait awhile, for there is a second course to come. Satan looks with quite as self-satisfied an air upon his guests this time as he did upon the troop of rioters. "Ah," says he, "I cheated those gay fellows with the cup of pleasure—I gave them, afterwards, the dull cup of satiety and I have cheated you, too. You think yourselves all right, but I have deceived you twice, I have befooled you, indeed."

So he brings in a cup which sometimes, he himself does not like to serve. It is called the cup of discontent and unquietness of mind and many there are that have to drink this after all their self-satisfaction. Do you not find, you that are very good in your own esteem, but have no interest in Christ, that when you are alone and begin to turn over your accounts for eternity, that they do not square somehow—that you cannot strike the balance exactly to your own side after all, as you thought you could? Have not you sometimes found that when you thought you were standing on a rock, there was a quivering beneath your feet? You heard the Christian sing boldly—

*"Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who anything to my charge shall lay?
While, through Your blood, absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."*

And you have said, "Well, I cannot sing that. I have been as good a Churchman as ever lived, I never missed going to my Church all these years, but I cannot say I have a solid confidence."

You had once a hope of self-satisfaction, but now the second course has come in and you are not quite so contented. "Well," says another, "I have been to my Chapel and I have been baptized and made a profession of religion, though I was never brought to know the Lord in sincerity and in truth and I once thought it was all well with me, but I want a something which I cannot find." Now comes a shaking in the heart. It is not quite so delightful as one supposed, to build on one's own righteousness. Ah, that is the second course. Wait awhile and perhaps in this world, but certainly in the hour of death, the devil will bring in the third cup of dismay at the discovery of your lost condition. How many a man who has been self-righteous all his life, has, at the last discovered that the thing whereon he placed his hope had failed him? I have heard of an army, who, being defeated in battle, endeavored to make good a retreat. With all their might the soldiers fled to a certain river, where they expected to find a bridge across which they could retreat and be in safety, but when they came to the stream, there was heard a shriek of terror—"The bridge is broken, the bridge is broken!" All in vain was that cry, for the multitude hurrying on behind, pressed upon those that were before and forced them into the river, until the stream was glutted with the bodies of drowned men.

Such must be the fate of the self-righteous. You thought there was a bridge of ceremonies. That Baptism, Confirmation and the Lord's Supper made up the solid arches of a bridge of good works and duties. But when you come to die, there shall be heard the cry—"The bridge is broken, the bridge is broken!" It will be in vain for you to turn round then. Death is close behind you. He forces you onward and you discover what it is to perish, through having neglected the great salvation and attempting to save yourself through your own good works. This is the last course but one. And your last course of all, the worst wine, your everlasting portion must be the same as that of the profligate. Good as you thought yourself to be, inasmuch as you proudly rejected Christ, you must drink the wine cup. The wrath of God. That cup which is full of trembling. The wicked of the earth shall wring out the dregs of that cup and drink them. And you also must drink of it as deep as they. Oh, beware in time! Put away your high looks and humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Some of you have as yet escaped the lash, but there is a third table crowded with most honorable guests. I believe there have been more princes and kings, mayors and aldermen and great merchants sitting at this table, than at any other. It is called the table of worldliness. "Humph," says a man, "Well, I dislike the profligate—there's my eldest son—I've been hard at work saving up money all my life and there's that young fellow, he will not stick to business—he has become a real profligate, I am very glad the minister spoke so sharp about that. As for me—there now. I don't care about your self-righteous people a single farthing. To me it is of no account at all. I don't care at all about religion in the slightest degree. I like to know whether the funds rise or fall, or whether there is an opportunity of making a good bargain. That's about all I care for." Ah, worldling, I have read of a friend of yours who was clothed in scarlet and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. Do you know what became of him? You should remember it, for the same end awaits yourself. The end of his feast must be the end of yours.

If your God is this world, depend upon it you shall find that your way is full of bitterness. Now see that table of the worldly man—the mere worldling—who lives for gain. Satan brings him in a flowing cup—"There," says he, "Young man, you are starting in business. You need not care about the conventionalities of honesty or about the ordinary oldfashioned fancies of religion—get rich as quick as ever you can. Get money—get money—honestly if you can, but, if not, get it anyhow," says the devil. And down he puts his tankard. "There," says he, "is a foaming draught for you." "Yes," says the young man, "I have abundance now. My hopes are indeed realized." Here, then, you see the first and best wine of the worldling's feast and many of you are tempted to envy this man. "Oh, that I had such a prospect in business," says one. "I'm not half so sharp as he is, I could not deal as he deals. My religion would not let me. But how fast he gets rich! O that I could prosper as he does." Come, my Brother, judge not before the time, there's a second course to come, the thick and nauseous draught of care.

The man has got his money but they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare. Wealth ill-gotten, or ill-used, or hoarded, brings canker with it—that does not canker the gold and silver—but cankers the man's heart and a cankered heart is one of the most awful things a man can have. Ah, see this money-lover and mark the care which sits upon his heart. There is a poor old woman that lives near his lodge gate. She has but a pittance a week, but she says, "Bless the Lord, I have enough!" She never asks how she is to live, or how she is to die, or how she is to be buried, but sleeps sweetly on the pillow of contentment and faith. And here is this poor fool with untold gold. He is miserable because he happened to drop a sixpence as he walked along the streets, or because he had an extra call upon his charity to which the presence of some friend compelled him to yield. Or perhaps he groans because his coat wears out too soon.

After this comes avarice. Many have had to drink of that cup—may God save any of us from its fiery drops. A great American preacher has said, "Covetousness breeds misery. The sight of houses better than our own, of dress beyond our means, of jewels costlier than we may wear, of stately equipage and rare curiosities beyond our reach—these hatch the viper brood of covetous thoughts—vexing the poor, who would be rich—tormenting the rich, who would be richer. The covetous man pines to see pleasure. He is sad in the presence of cheerfulness. And the joy of the world is his sorrow because all the happiness of others is not his. I do not wonder that God abhors him. He inspects his heart as he would a cave full of noisome birds, or a nest of rattling reptiles and loathes the sight of its crawling tenants. To the covetous man life is a nightmare and God lets him wrestle with it as best he may. Mammon might build its palace on such a heart and Pleasure bring all its revelry there, Honor all its garlands—it would be like pleasures in a sepulcher and garlands on a tomb."

When a man becomes avaricious, all he has is nothing to him. "More, more, more!" says he, like some poor creatures in a terrible fever, who cry, "Drink, drink, drink!" and you give them drink, but after they have it, their thirst increases. Like the horseleech they cry, "Give, give, give!" Avarice is a raving madness which seeks to grasp the world in its arms and yet despises the plenty it has already. This is a curse of which many have died. And some have died with the bag of gold in their hands and with misery upon their brow because they could not take it with them into their coffin and could not carry it into another world. Well, then, there comes the next course.

Baxter and those terrible old preachers used to picture the miser and the man who lived only to make gold, in the middle of Hell. And they imagined Mammon pouring melted gold down his throat, "There," say the mocking devils "that is what you wanted, you have got it now. Drink, drink, drink!" and the molten gold is poured down. I shall not, however indulge in any such terrible imaginations. But this much I know, he that lives to himself here, must perish—he who sets his affections upon things on earth, has not dug deep—he has built his house upon the sands and when the rain descends and the floods come, down must come his house and great must be the fall. It is the best wine first, however. It is the respectable man—respectable and respected—everybody honors him—and afterwards that which is worse, when meanness has beggared his wealth and covetousness has maddened his brain. It is sure to come, as sure as ever you give yourself up to worldliness.

The fourth table is set in a very secluded corner, in a very private part of Satan's palace. There is the table set for secret sinners and here the old rule is observed. At that table, in a room well darkened, I see a young man sitting today and Satan is the servitor, stepping in so noiselessly, that no one would hear him. He brings in the first cup—and O how sweet it is! It is the cup of secret sin. "Stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." How sweet that morsel, eaten all alone! Was there ever one that rolled so delicately under the tongue? That is the first. After that, he brings in another—the wine of an unquiet conscience. The man's eyes are opened. He says, "What have I done? What have I been doing? Ah," cries this Achan, "the first cup you brought me I saw sparkling in that a wedge of gold and a goodly Babylon garment. And I thought, 'Oh, I must have that.' But now my thought is, 'What shall I do to bide this, where shall I put it?' I must dig. Yes, I must dig deep as Hell before I shall hide it, for sure enough it will be discovered."

The grim governor of the feast is bringing in a massive bowl, filled with a black mixture. The secret sinner drinks and is confounded—he fears his sin will find him out. He has no peace, no

happiness, he is full of uneasy fear. He is afraid that he shall be detected. He dreams at night that there is someone after him. There is a voice in his ear telling him, "I know all about it. I will tell it." He thinks, perhaps, that the sin which he has committed in secret will break out to his friends. The father will know it, the mother will know it. Yes, it may be even the physician will tell the tale and blab out the wretched secret. For such a man there is no rest. He is always in dread of arrest. He is like the debtor I have read of, who, owing a great deal of money, was afraid the bailiffs were after him—and happening one day to catch his sleeve on the top of a palisade, said, "There, let me go. I'm in a hurry. I will pay you tomorrow," imagining that some one was laying hold of him.

Such is the position in which the man places himself by partaking of the hidden things of dishonesty and sin. Thus he finds no rest for the sole of his foot for fear of discovery. At last the discovery comes—it is the last cup. Often it comes on earth. For be sure your sin will find you out and it will generally find you out here. What frightful exhibitions are to be seen at our police courts of men that are made to drink that last black draught of discovery. The man who presided at religious meetings, the man who was honored as a saint, is at last unmasked. And what said the judge—and what said the world of him? He is a jest and a reproach and a rebuke everywhere. But, suppose he should be so crafty that he passes through life without discovery—though I think it is almost impossible—what a cup he must drink when he stands at last before the bar of God! "Bring him forth, jailor! Dread keeper of the dungeon of Hell, lead forth the prisoner." He comes! The whole world is assembled. "Stand up, Sir! Did you not make a profession of religion? Did not everybody think you a saint?" He is speechless. But many there are in that vast crowd who cry, "We thought him so." The book is open, his deeds are read—transgression after transgression all laid bare.

Do you hear that hiss? The righteous, moved to indignation, are lifting up their voices against the man who deceived them and dwelt among them as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Oh, how fearful it must be to bear the scorn of the universe! The good can bear the scorn of the wicked but for the wicked to bear the shame and everlasting contempt which righteous indignation will heap upon them! Oh that will be one of the most frightful things, next to the eternal endurance of the wrath of the Most High, which, I need not add, is the last cup of the devil's terrible feast with which the secret sinner must be filled, forever and ever.

I pause now, but it is just to gather up my strength to beg that anything I may have said, that shall have the slightest personal bearing upon any of my Hearers, may not be forgotten. I beseech you, Brothers and Sisters, if now you are eating the fat and drinking the sweet of Hell's banquet, pause and reflect what shall the end be? "He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that sows to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." I cannot spare more time for that, most assuredly.

II. But you must pardon me while I occupy only a few minutes in taking you into the HOUSE OF THE SAVIOR, where He feasts His Beloved. Come and sit with us at Christ's table of outward providences. He does not feast His children after the fashion of the Prince of Darkness—for the first cup that Christ brings to them is very often a cup of bitterness. There are His own Beloved children, His own redeemed—who have but sorry cheer. Jesus brings in the cup of poverty and affliction and He makes His own children drink of it, till they say, "You have made me drunk with wormwood and You have filled me with bitterness." This is the way Christ begins. The worst wine first. When the sergeant begins with a young recruit, he gives him a shilling and then afterwards come the march and the battle. But Christ never takes His recruits so. They must count the cost, lest they should begin to build and not be able to relish. He seeks to have no disciples who are dazzled with first appearances. He begins roughly with them and many have been His children who have found that the first course of the Redeemer's table has been affliction, sorrow, poverty and want.

In the olden time, when the best of God's people were at the table, He used to serve them worst, for they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—for whom the world was not worthy and they kept on drinking of these bitter cups for many a day. But let me tell you afterwards He brought out sweeter cups for them and you that have been troubled have found it so. After the cup of affliction, comes the cup of consolation and, oh, how

sweet is that! It has been the privilege of these lips to drink that cup after sickness and pain. And I can bear witness, that I said of my Master, "You have kept the best wine until now." It was so luscious that the taste did take away every taste of the bitterness of sorrow. And I said, "Surely the bitterness of this sickness is all past, for the Lord has manifested Himself to me and given me His best wine."

But, Beloved, the best wine is to come last. God's people will find it so outwardly. The poor saint comes to die. The Master has given him the cup of poverty, but now no more he drinks thereof, he is rich to all the intents of bliss. He has had the cup of sickness. He shall drink of that no more. He has had the cup of persecution but now he is glorified, together with his Master and made to sit upon His Throne. The best things have come last to him in outward circumstances. There were two martyrs once burned at Stratford-le-Bow. One of them was lame and the other blind and when they were tied to the stake, the lame man took his crutch and threw it down and said to the other, "Cheer up, Brother, this is the sharp medicine that shall heal us. I shall not be lame within an hour of this time nor shall you be blind."

No, the best things were to come last. But I have often thought that the child of God is very much like the crusaders. The crusaders started off on their journey and they had to fight their way through many miles of enemies and to march through leagues of danger. You remember, perhaps, in history, the story that when the armies of the Duke of Bouillon came in sight of Jerusalem, they sprang from their horses, clapped their hands and cried, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem." They forgot all their toils, all the weariness of the journey and all their wounds, for there was Jerusalem in their sight. And how will the saint at last cry, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," when all sorrow and all poverty and sickness are past and he is blest with immortality! The bad wine—bad did I say? No, the bitter wine is taken away and the best wine is brought out and the saint sees himself glorified forever with Christ Jesus.

And now, we will sit down at the table of inward experience. The first cup that Christ brings to His children, when they sit at that table, is one so bitter that, perhaps, no tongue can ever describe it—it is the cup of conviction. It is a black cup, full of the most intense bitterness. The Apostle Paul once drank a little of it but it was so strong that it made him blind for three days. The conviction of his sin overpowered him totally. He could only give his soul to fasting and to prayer and it was only when he drank of the next cup that the scales fell from off his eyes.

I have drank of it, Children of God and I thought that Jesus was unkind, but, in a little while, He brought me forth a sweeter cup, the cup of His forgiving love, filled with the rich crimson of His precious blood. Oh, the taste of that wine is in my mouth this very hour, for the taste thereof is as the wine of Lebanon, that abides in the cask for many a day. Do you not remember, when, after you had drunk the cup of sorrow, Jesus came and showed you His hands and His side and said, "Sinner, I have died for you and given Myself for you. Believe on Me." Do you not remember how you believed and sipped the cup and you have believed again and took a deeper draught and said, "Blessed be the name of God from this time forth and forever. And let the whole earth say, 'Amen,' for He has broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder and let the captives go free"? Since then the glorious Master has said to you, "Friend, come up higher!" and He has taken you to upper seats in the best rooms and He has given you sweeter things.

I will not tell you, today, of the wines you have drunk. The spouse in Solomon's Song may supply the deficiency of my sermon this morning. She drank of the spiced wine of His pomegranate. And so have you, in those high and happy moments when you had fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. But tarry awhile, He has kept the best wine yet. You shall soon come near the banks of the Jordan and then you shall begin to drink of the old wine of the kingdom that has been barreled up since the foundation of the world. The vintage of the Savior's agony. The vintage of Gethsemane shall soon be broached for you—the old wine of the kingdom. You are come into the land "Beulah," and you begin to taste the full flavor of the wines on the lees well refined. You know how Bunyan describes the state which borders on the vale of death. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. A land where the angels often came to visit the saints and to bring bundles of myrrh from the land of spices.

And now the high step is taken, the Lord puts His finger upon your eyelids and kisses your soul out at your lips. Where are you now? In a sea of love and life and bliss and immortality. O Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, you have indeed kept the best wine until now! My Master! I have seen You on the Sabbath, but this is an everlasting Sabbath. I have met You in the congregation, but this is a congregation that shall never break up. O my Master! I have seen the promises, but this is the fulfillment. I have blessed You for gracious providences, but this is something more than all these—You did give me grace, but now You have given me glory—You were once my shield, but You are now my sun. I am at Your right hand, where there is fullness of joy forever. You have kept Your best wine until now. All I ever had before was as nothing compared with this."

And, lastly, for only time fails me, I could preach a week upon this subject. The Table of Communion is one at which Godly children must sit. And the first thing they must drink of there is the cup of communion with Christ in His sufferings. If you would come to the Table of Communion with Christ, you must first of all drink of the wine of Calvary. Christian, your head must be crowned with thorns, your hands must be pierced—I mean not with nails, but, spiritually you must be crucified with Christ. We must suffer with Him, or else we cannot reign with Him. We must labor with Him first, we must sup of the wine which His Father gave Him to drink, or else we cannot expect to come to the better part of the feast. After drinking of the wine of His sufferings and continuing to drink of it, we must drink of the cup of His labors, we must be baptized with His Baptism, we must labor after souls and sympathize with Him in that ambition of His heart—the salvation of sinners. And after that He will give us to drink of the cup of His anticipated honors.

Here on earth we shall have good wine in communion with Christ in His resurrection, in His triumphs and His victories. But the best wine is to come at last. O chambers of communion, your gates have been opened to me. But I have only been able to glance within them. But the day is coming when on your diamond hinges you shall turn and stand wide open forever and ever. And I shall enter into the king's palace and go no more out. O Christian! You shall soon see the King in His beauty. Your head shall soon be on His bosom. You shall soon sit at His feet with Mary. You shall soon do as the spouse did, you shall kiss Him with the kisses of His lips and feel that His love is better than wine. I can conceive you, Brothers and Sisters, in the very last moment of your life, or rather, in the first moment of your life, saying, "He has kept the best wine until now."

When you begin to see Him face to face—when you enter into the closest fellowship—with nothing to disturb or to distract you, then shall you say "The best wine is kept until now."

A saint was once dying and another who sat by him said—"Farewell, Brother, I shall never see you again in the land of the living." "Oh," said the dying man, "I shall see you again in the land of the living that is up yonder, where I am going. This is the land of the dying." Oh Brothers and Sisters, if we should never meet again in the land of the dying, we have a hope that we shall meet in the land of the living and drink the best wine at last!