

Altogether Lovely

by J. K. POPHAM

"His mouth is most sweet; yea, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." (Songs 5:16)

The foundation, the root, of this blessed exclamation will be found in the painful and shameful experience which the church describes earlier in this chapter. She had been sleeping. She was locked up in self security, in spiritual idleness. She had washed her feet; she was separate from the world, as she thought. She had gone to bed: it was pleasant to her; she was easy, and did not want to be disturbed, not by anyone or for anything. And her Lord came to her. His voice in her heart was the knocking at the door: "Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled; for My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night." Once a gracious word spoken moved her, melted her, attracted her, held her. Now the change is great. The endearing words of Christ have no effect upon her. She is so pleased with her position, so content with her sleep, that she does not want to be disturbed; and heaven's sweetest voice leaves her cold and unimpressed. Do you know this person? She replies to the invitation to her to open the door; she says, "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" And this to her Redeemer, her Lord, her Husband this treatment, this return for His love. Do you know this? What says conscience? But the Lord will not be put off. Proud man in his haughtiness dares to say that the mighty will of man paralyzes Jesus Christ. What a horrible blasphemy! But then such people, people who say such things, do not know Him. They do not know His mighty way of winning, they do not know His loving way of conquering. He puts His hand in by the hole of the door of the house, His hand of mercy, His hand covered with myrrh, and He leaves some of it on the handle of the door, and this greatly affects her heart; she cannot help it now, she must move. Heaven was stronger than earth, grace more than sin, lively operations of God more than the idleness of her own spirit; and so she rises, as all do who get the same mercy. She rises, faith moves; faith is stronger than unbelief, love is stronger than deadness, as all know who experience such things; and she rises to let Him in, opens the door, has no suspicion of what her treatment has done, does not seem at all to think that He will resent it. She opens the door as if she was sure to find Him there. But though He will not be put off, He is grieved. He is grieved with the treatment He receives: unbelief is unkind, unbelief is hard, and sleep is offensive to Him; so He goes away: "My Beloved had withdrawn Himself." Do you know His absence? When men have had His presence, they know what absence means; only such people can tell you what God's absence is.

"My Beloved had withdrawn Himself." He was still hers. He had the place He had made for Himself in her heart. "My Beloved." Would she go back to bed? Can she be content, can she rest with Him? No; so she goes forth in the night. An unseemly thing this for a woman to do in an unlighted eastern street, an unseemly, strange thing; but she went, went forth in the dark night. You will do everything, and brave every danger, and face all difficulties, if Christ moves you; you will not be content without Him. What a mercy it is to have a place for Him in your heart! What a mercy it is so to want Him as to face every danger and trouble, to seek Him! "I went about the city, I sought Him, but I could not find Him." O the reflections that come in here, how

she would begin to think, "What a base creature I was! What a fool I was! Now I want Him, I cannot find Him; I treated Him basely, and He has treated me wisely." "I sought Him, but I could not find Him, I called Him, but He gave me no answer." Strange this experience, and solemn too. What! You treated Him so basely, and now He has touched you, and you seek Him, but He will not let you find Him; you call to Him, but He gives you no answer. Then you find heaven better than earth, Christ better than self; and you will want and want and want, and never give up wanting, never give up seeking, till He allows you to find Him again.

"The watchmen that went about the city found me." Ministers will find you sometimes. You may go here and there, and not open your case to any one but the Lord, but a watchman will find you out. He will tell you of your condition, describe your case, and open out to you what you have done; and so he will wound you, he will take away your vail from you, expose you to your own gaze, and let you see what you have been and what you have done, and then you will cry aloud, "O that He would come!" You will not resent the wounding by the watchman; you will not resent the tearing away from you of all false covering, but you will just be made to feel this, "I have procured all to myself." Then she loudly calls after Him, and charges all about her to tell Him, if they find Him, that she, His wife, is sick of love. When Christ smites, we feel the sin for which we are smitten; but when He touches the heart, then there is a sickness of love. You may be sick of sin, and hardly be able to say this, "I am sick of love." But she says, "Tell Him now, the change has come, and I am sick of love. I want Him so badly, I need Him so truly, my case is so hopeless without Him; tell Him that I am sick of love, if you meet with Him." And then those about her put a question to her, "Why are you making such an ado? Why this outcry and noise about your Beloved? What is He? Is He more than another Beloved?"

So then she answers the question in this beautiful, wonderful, divinely inspired description of Christ, and the text is the climax; as if she should say, "When I have said all, I have not said much. His mouth is most sweet; superlative indeed, above all other sweetnesses, His mouth is sweet." And then, as if that were not enough, as if it did not and could not express all she felt, as if feeling it sensibly, she cries out, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." I wish the Lord would give us to enter into this word. If He will help me a little to speak of it, I shall be glad. But I wish our souls might be so enamoured of Christ, might have the cloud of sin so taken away, as that there should be nothing intervening between our eyes and Himself; that we might so gaze on Him as to feel that our hearts are taken up with Him; that He has our hearts and our affections; and that there is none to be compared with Him. We should then be like the elect in heaven in our manner and measure. They stand before His Throne, they see Him on His Throne, they see the seven spirits of God before His Throne; they look upon Him. He is in the midst of them, no weary vail of the flesh intervenes. No weariness troubles them, no backslidings hurt them, and grieve Him; they look on Him. We have the flesh; we have more flesh than spirit, often much more unbelief than faith, more carnality than spirituality; we are poor creatures. I do not speak this sentimentally; it is a great and grievous reality, a solemn and frequent experience that some have. O for a view of Christ without the black cloud of sin intervening or any way darkening!

"His mouth is most sweet." This intimates that there are communications made to the souls of the saints by the Lord of life and glory. Communications. Thoughts are in His heart, and He expresses them. All thought must be expressed, if it is to be known. What you think is your own, till you utter it. God has thoughts: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." (Jer. 29:11)

How can you know those thoughts, if He is not pleased to communicate them? So the mouth of Christ here spoken of intimates this great truth to us, that He does communicate with His people, gives them something, says something to them. The gospel, O what a communication that is the glorious gospel of Christ! Justification, what a communication that is! Eternal love for a soul, how, when it is communicated, it melts the heart! Grace to overcome sin, blood to pardon it, a robe to justify and cover the soul, power to sustain, wisdom to guide, patience, compassion, and forbearance these opened and communicated are the things which make Christ's mouth most sweet. "But I am a sinner." These things are for sinners; that is the mercy as well as the wonder. If you were not a sinner, what would this gospel be to you? That is why the world despises this, because it does not feel any need of it. But when one feels his need, then when Christ meets that need by some communication, His mouth is most sweet. It is beautiful to friends to hear their friends speak; to the wife to hear her husband speak, and to the husband to hear the wife speak; and so throughout the relationships in life. O, but what is all that compared with this, that Christ speaks to sinners? That is the doctrine of this word, "His mouth is most sweet." Christ speaks to sinners, tells them some things, tells them about Himself: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost;" (Matt. 18:11) tells them about what He has come to do: to bear sin by being made sin; tells them about the Throne of grace, and how they are to reach it: "If ye shall ask anything in My Name, I will do it." What a mercy it is for Christ to say something to sinners! Why, there is nothing to be compared with it, nothing. It is just this, that God opens His heart, and communicates something of that to the soul. It is not a general idea of the gospel that will save a soul; it is the communication of that gospel in some measure to the soul by Jesus Christ Himself. Ah, and His communication will still every storm, remove all fear, clear all clouds away, take suspicions and put them at rest; and all the jealousies, fears, and sinkings of the heart vanish when this blessed mouth speaks. For "where the word of a king is, there is power." When He speaks His gospel, He speaks it in power. When I try to preach it, you hear it, but there may be no power with the hearing. You may just hear the form of words and approve of it; but when the mouth of Christ is opened through a minister sometimes one would bless God it has been so occasionally here, then it is quite another thing. It comes in, it speaks away all objections, it takes away all obstacles, leaves the soul and Christ alone together. Then what a sweet word it is!

"Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled." It does not seem as if such a word could be spoken to some of us. You may think, "Now how could the Lord call me undefiled? I am defiled. How could He tell me that He sees nothing blameworthy in me?" Why, by His precious pardon, by His free and full forgiveness. That will do it, that will accomplish the great matter in your soul. That will cause you to say, "I understand it, I know what it means, I know what it is to feel cleansed from all sin." That is the way to learn some of the things that the Scripture speaks about; not to have them lodged only in your brain, but in your heart, to have them written there by the Spirit of the living God. When He speaks a promise, in the covenant of grace, in the atonement of Christ is, as spoken, a sweet word, full of mercy. And when He tells you that He will never leave you nor forsake you, as sometimes He does say to some people, then His mouth in that is most sweet. When He speaks in the covenant, tells you that He has graved you upon the palms of His hands, that your walls, or the remembrance of you, are continually before Him, (Isa. 49:16) then you will find such a power in that as to make you believe what He says. Job once felt that if the Lord did speak to him, he would not believe it; but when the Lord did speak, then Job did believe it. We speak foolishly when we are in the dark;

but when Christ speaks, and we understand by the power of His word that He is speaking, then we believe Him.

"My beloved spake, and said unto me." Some here may be wishing He would speak to them. Let the wish out before Him; and as you are enabled to do that, you will find the answer come one day, and you will say, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications." I tell you this, my friends, if you were to put the depravity of your nature, the sins of your heart, your bad thoughts, your wickedness, your wrong wishes, your hypocrisies and malice and bitterness, enmity, hardness, and ingratitude put them all before Him like a great wall of thorns, He would say, "I will go through them, I will burn them up." Then you say, "If He burns them, He will burn me, because I am surrounded with them." O, but Christ knows how to burn the sins of His people, and save them. And He knows how to make them understand that He has put their sins away, and they themselves are His. They are His beloved, His only beloved, dear to Him, so dear to Him in eternity that He came in time to save them. How sweet His word is, sweeter than honey or the honeycomb! I wish the Lord would make us hear this sweet mouth of Christ speaking some gracious words to us. We should find a heaven in our souls, a blessed heaven. And I wish we might all more and more fall in love with Him, through the beauties of His grace and face shining into our souls. Ah, it is a great thing to fall in love with Christ. You will never manage it yourself, but as you get to see the beauties of Christ, your whole heart will be won at last, and you will say, "This is His doing. His beauty attracted me, His love melted me; His communicated goodness affected me, and I could not help loving Him, because He has loved me." "We loved Him, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Jesus visits sinners. Blessed be His Name, some of us know it. I would like to speak well of Him, He is such a good God God in my nature. And when we see Him in our nature, we see His greatness and majesty and glory veiled to bearableness. We can bear the sight of God Incarnate. O that He would appear to us, and speak to us!

Let us go on to notice the next word: "Yea, He is altogether lovely." His whole Person, not His mouth only, which communicates, but His entire Person is lovely. Here it needs a better tongue than mine, yet if God will use mine just to speak a little of this, the unsearchable riches of Christ, I should be glad. The unsearchable riches of Christ you cannot trace completely. Picture them out as you will, describe them as you can, you cannot fully trace them out. Look at His Person O, if we could but know that more! Hart has a beautiful word about this:

"O could we but with clearer eyes
His excellencies trace,
Could we His Person learn to prize,
We more should prize His grace."

The Person of Jesus Christ is none other than God in our nature two becoming one. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;" (Isa. 9:6) and these are not two, according to Scripture, but one. "And His Name," the Name of Him who is the Child born and the Son given, "shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." Jesus Christ in the sinner's place. Jesus Christ altogether lovely, because sent by His Father, a perfect Person. Did you ever a little trace by faith the loveliness of Christ's Person all divine excellencies and perfections, all the

beauty of human nature in its innocence, combined in Him, shining in Him? All that a Representative needs to be, He is; all that a Sin-bearer needs to be, He is. All that one who must open the mouth for the dumb, must be in merit and in quality and in highness and standing, Christ answers to. All that one must do who is to die in the place of others, die a voluntary, and therefore a vicarious, death, Christ has done. What a Person He is! Able to save by His intercession; able to govern, because in Him are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" able to defend, and to give a convoy to a sinner, the convoy of His love, the guidance of His wisdom, the protection of His power, and the supply of His fullness. Living tongues are dumb at best. My voice, my poor words, may have some sweetness in them to you by the Holy Ghost. Christ is the Person, God and Man in one Person, Immanuel, God with us, a Person between God and sinners, a Person to take up sinners, to bless sinners, save sinners, sanctify sinners, justify the ungodly, communicate Himself; a Person who, likened to a vine, will have united and grafted into Himself dead things, sticks, as it were, without root and life. These He will have joined to Him, that His own living sap and vital, eternal life shall vivify and fructify them. This is the Person: is He lovely to you? To me?

We pore on self, we look at self, we deprecate our ways, and wonder sometimes what God will do with us. We look at our depravity, and can scarcely bear the sight of it; we look at our sinful ways till we are sick of looking at them, and yet, look at them we must. But when the eye of faith is turned away for a short time to look at this lovely One, this blessed One, whom the Father praises, who is "fairer than the children of men," into whose lips grace is poured; then we see One who can cover our vileness, take away all our defects, and communicate His worthiness to us. So that when the Father says of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," He can look on a multitude, a mighty multitude, "which no man could number," and say, "These are My sons, and I am pleased with them;" pleased with them because they are in Him.

"Altogether lovely" so that nothing can be added, nothing can be higher, nothing can compare with Him. "Altogether lovely" the loveliness of God, the loveliness of His compassion, pity, mercy, and power, and the loveliness of human nature without a stain, never knowing any corruption, all, all in Him. Poor sinner, do you feel a base creature? Are you too vile for yourself, sick and faint with a sight and sense of what you are, an idolater, a base thing, possessing a nature too horrible for language? Are you such? Behold this blessed One. God give you a sight of Him! I will tell you this, it will not make you less vile in your nature, but it will make you believe that, though so vile in yourself, you are spotless and blameless in Him.

"Altogether lovely" in His work; lovely on the cross: the glory of God, as one speaks, is in a blaze there. See His glory in a blaze; justice, truth, righteousness, mercy, love, wisdom, and power, all, all meet there. O that wondrous cross by which Christ made peace! How wonderful it is to look on this cross, the Lord Jesus Christ crucified! If we get a glimpse of it, we shall not wonder at the apostle Paul saying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14) There God will embrace you, O poor sinner, mourning over your sins; there He will smile on you, and you will frown on yourself. There He will let out His goodness and His love and His kindness. Poor sinner, there you will find yourself "reconciled in the body of His flesh through death," that you may be presented faultless and without blame before the presence of His glory in heaven. (Jude 1:24) How beautiful how glorious, how lovely is Christ on the cross! The ignominy of His death will be the glory of our souls, if the virtue of His death

is brought to us. Christ's agony will be our healing and joy, Christ's shame will be our beauty, Christ's death will be our life. He was "crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man;" (Heb. 2:9) and that death will crown us with eternal life, the favour of God. O sinner, you will never live with God except through the cross, you will never get near to Him except by the cross, you will never be purified but by the work of Christ; never, never get a smile but by the cross; never, never hear a kind word in your soul from heaven, but as it comes sounding to you through the cross. O the cross of Christ! Let the papists make their crosses by the million, they have had a good many forests at that business; but be it given to us to glory in this one thing, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:2) Is He lovely on the cross to you, altogether lovely?

Next, He is lovely in the grave, altogether lovely there. But for the burial of Christ, we must all of us have been in an eternal grave of woe and misery. Christ buried means everything. "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures," (1 Cor. 15:3) says Paul, and "was buried." I have been glad that that word was inserted there, and have been sorry that I have so little preached the burial of Jesus Christ. Remember that word, He "saw no corruption;" (Acts 13:37) and may it be opened to us that there is virtue for us in that, necessary virtue. If at any moment Jesus Christ had seen, or felt, or known, or had attaching to Him, corruption of any kind, He could not be a perfect Saviour. But everywhere, in everything, in all His works, there was no corruption; no corruption in the grave. Watts beautifully says,

"Where should the dying members rest
But with their dying Head?"

He left a long perfume in the grave. We literally shall see corruption; but the Lord of life and glory lay in the grave uncorrupted, incorruptible; He faded not there, no fading attached to Him there. The leaf fades when autumn comes, and the touch of frost severs it from the tree. Jesus died, but He faded not, He saw no corruption. And this purity is imputed, it belongs to every believing soul. Is He beautiful to you? Is His burial lovely? When He was buried, His enemies thought they had got rid of Him; the church sees Him buried, and says, "There is my Lord." And she looks into the grave, and perceives a virtue, a sweetness, an odour of goodness there, no corruption.

And He is "altogether lovely" in His resurrection. The third day He was raised again, and "He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs;" and those proofs are asserted in Scripture. And having showed Himself to many here and there, He was received up into heaven. A risen Christ is the hope of a quickened soul. I am glad when I can believe in the resurrection of Christ comfortably, as I did the other day, when standing by the open grave of an old friend, whom I buried. It is great to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We hold the doctrine of it, but when the virtue of that doctrine is let out by the Spirit into the soul, then we know there is a power in it. The apostles with great power gave witness to this doctrine of the resurrection of Christ.

"Altogether lovely" in His ascension to heaven. My friends, when He came down from heaven and took up human nature, then He was a poor Man. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty

might be rich." (2 Cor. 8:9) But when He ascended, it was different. Then He was a Conqueror, then He had the devil, so to speak, chained to His ascending chariot; then He led captivity captive; yea, and He received gifts for men. He went into heaven full, as it were; went there rich, having had given to Him all power in heaven and in earth. A risen Christ, O what a Saviour! Did you ever see Him rise?

"Altogether lovely" in His intercession. He opens His mouth for the dumb. Some people here are dumb. You kneel down sometimes, and you are dumb; you move about and try to pray, and you are dumb. What makes you dumb? Guilt, guilt, guilt; sin in you, and sin done by you. You are dumb. "Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." (Ps. 51:15) One speaks for others there. Do you understand that? But then, if you are dumb, what can you do? You have no excuses to make, you cannot make one. Have you a plea to urge? Excuses never go well at the Throne of grace, but pleas enter. What pleas? The blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the death of Christ, the burial and the resurrection of Christ. He says, "If ye shall ask anything in My Name, My Name now so great I will do it." Yea, He is altogether lovely in this His great work in heaven, interceding for His own.

"Lovely" in His power. He possesses all power in heaven and in earth. Lovely in His wisdom. "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" He possesses. Lovely in His care, ever caring for His people, and never intermitting His care for one single moment. Lovely in His promises, never to leave nor forsake His people. Lovely in His goodness, which is exhaustless, enduring for ever. Lovely in His grace, which is effectual, and will subdue all sin. Lovely in His faithfulness, whereby He says, "I will never leave you, I will come again, I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." And lovely in that He has prepared mansions for His people in that lovely place, heaven, and says to them, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3) Do you say it is too great for you? Well but, my friends, God can give you grace to receive it. The poorer the wretch, the more welcome; the worse the case, the more credit, if I may speak so, to the Physician who heals. He is skilful, and He has balm. He is good, and He lives to communicate of His goodness to His children. Lovely altogether. Join all the wondrous names of beauty in creation, put them all together, and they will all fade into insignificance by the side of this wondrous Person, whose Name is Immanuel, God with us.

Well, I must leave off. A living tongue, such a tongue as mine, is but dumb at the very best. I would speak well of Him, and I know He is not displeased with my wish to speak well of Him. O, but may the Holy Ghost preach Him! If He preaches Him in your hearts, then you will know this text as I am not able to express it to you: "Yea, He is altogether lovely." Then you will say, "This is my Friend, my Friend in a time of need. This is my Friend, who, when all earthly friends have gone, will stand by me. This is my Friend, who will come to me in a time of trouble; for He is born for adversity. This is my Friend, who will not let me be overthrown nor overcome. He sticks fast.

"An earthly brother drops his hold,
Is sometimes hot and sometimes cold,
But Jesus is the same."

This is my Friend." He calls His people friends: "Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends," (John 15:15)and He acts the part of a friend. He does what a friend does "for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you."

"This is my Beloved." "I treated Him basely, but He would not be put off; He would come in. He fetched me off my bed, He drew me out of my idleness, He forgave my baseness. He let me lay hold of Him again. This is my Beloved.

"This God is the God I adore,
My faithful, unchangeable friend,
Whose love is as large as His power,
neither knows measure nor end."

"My beloved." Faith will want to embrace Him and hold Him fast. Ah, and when He comes, He will still your fears, He will quiet your heart, He will tell you it is well with you. He will never let go His hold, nor let you quite leave Him. "This is my Beloved," the God of heaven, the God of grace, the God of the covenant of grace; the God who purchased the church with His own blood; the God who in heaven now looks on His people, looks after them, takes care of them, and will not leave them to be devoured by the lion, to be torn to pieces by the bear and the wolf, but will kindly protect them, and cover them. Says one, "I am torn now." Yes. Says the Lord: "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out." (Amos 3:12) So if you be torn by temptation and sin, yet belonging to Christ, He will say, "Now I am come to deliver you;" and you will find that you are put together again, made whole by Him who is the good Physician.

May the Lord give His great and good Spirit to us, to teach and tell us who this Person is, for His Name's sake.