

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter,

I. The church gives an account of a sore trial wherewith she was exercised through the withdrawing of her beloved from her, the pains she was at before she recovered the comfortable sense of his favour again, and the resolution she took, when she did recover it, not to lose it again, as she had done through her own carelessness (v. 1-5).

II. The daughters of Jerusalem admire the excellencies of the church (v. 6).

III. The church admires Jesus Christ under the person of Solomon, his bed, and the life-guards about it (v. 7, 8), his chariot (v. 9, 10). She calls upon the daughters of Zion, who were admiring her, to admire him rather, especially as he appeared on his coronation day and the day of his nuptials (v. 11).

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:1-5

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST

God is not wont to say to the seed of Jacob, *Seek you me in vain*; and yet here we have the spouse for a great while seeking her beloved in vain, but finding him at last, to her unspeakable satisfaction. It was hard to the Old-Testament church to find Christ in the ceremonial law, and the types and figures which then were *of good things to come*. Long was the consolation of Israel looked for before it came. The watchman of that church gave little assistance to those who enquired after him; but at length Simeon had *him* in his arms *whom his soul loved*. It is applicable to the case of particular believers, who often walk in darkness a great while, but *at even time it shall be light*, and those that seek Christ to the end shall find him at length. Observe,

I. How the spouse sought him in vain *upon her bed* (v. 1); when she was up and looking about her, grace in act and exercise, though her beloved

was withdrawn, yet she could see him at a distance (²⁰¹⁸Song of Solomon 2:8), but now it was otherwise. She still continued her affection to him, still it was *he whom her soul loved*, that bond of the covenant still continued firm. “*Though he slay me, I will trust in him; though he leave me, I will love him. When I have him not in my arms, I have him in my heart.*” But she wanted the communion she used to have with him, as David when he *thirsted for God, for the living God*. She sought him, but, **1.** It was *by night on her bed*; it was late and lazy seeking. Her understanding was clouded; it was by night, in the dark. Her affections were chilled, it was on her bed half asleep. The wise virgins slumbered in the absence of the bridegroom. It was a dark time with the believer; she saw not her signs, and yet she sought them. Those whose souls love Jesus Christ will continue to seek him even in silence and solitude: their *reins* instruct them to do so, even *in the night season*.

2. She failed in her endeavour. Sometimes he is *found of those that seek him not* (²⁶¹Isaiah 65:1), but here he is not found of one that sought him, either for punishment of her corruptions, her slothfulness and security (we miss of comfort because we do not seek it aright), or for the exercises of grace, her faith and patience, to try whether she will continue seeking. The woman of Canaan sought Christ, and found him not at first, that she might find him, at length, so much the more to her honour and comfort.

II. How she had sought him in vain abroad, v. 2. She had made trial of secret worship, and had gone through the duties of the closet, had remembered him on her bed and meditated on him in the *night-watches* (³⁵⁶Psalm 63:6), but she did not meet with comfort. *My sore ran in the night, and then I remembered God and was troubled,* ³⁷⁰Psalm 77:2, 3. And yet she is not driven off by the disappointment from the use of further means; she resolves, “*I will rise now; I will not lie here if I cannot find my beloved here, nor be content if he be withdrawn. I will rise now without delay, and seek him immediately, lest he withdraw further from me.*” Those that would seek Christ so as to find him must lose no time. “*I will rise out of a warm bed, and go out in a cold dark night, in quest of my beloved.*” Those that see Christ must not startle at difficulties. “*I will rise, and go about the city, the holy city, in the streets, and the broad-ways;*” for she knew he was not to be found in any blind by-ways. We must seek in the city, in Jerusalem, which was a type of the gospel-church. The likeliest place to find Christ is in the temple (⁴⁰⁶Luke 2:46), in the streets of the gospel-church, in holy ordinances, where the children of Zion pass and

repass at all hours. She had a good purpose when she said, *I will arise now*, but the good performance was all in all. She arose, and *sought him* (those that are in pursuit of Christ, the knowledge of him and communion with him, must turn every stone, seek every where), and yet she *found him not*; she was still unsatisfied, uneasy, as Job, when he looked on all sides, but could not perceive any tokens of the divine favour (^{<828>}Job 23:8, 9), and the Psalmist often, when he complained that God hid his face from him, ^{<884>}Psalm 88:14. We may be in the way of our duty and yet may miss the comfort, for *the wind bloweth where it listeth*. How heavy is the accent on this repeated complaint: *I sought him, but I found him not!* like that of Mary Magdalen, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him*, ^{<813>}John 20:13.

III. How she enquired of the watchmen concerning him, v. 3. In the night the watchmen *go about the city*, for the preservation of its peace and safety, to guide and assist the honest and quiet, as well as to be a check upon those that are disorderly; these met her in her walks, and she asked them if they could give her any tidings of her beloved. In the streets and broad-ways of Jerusalem she might meet with enough to divert her from her pursuit and to entertain her, though she could not meet her beloved; but she regards none in comparison with him. Gracious souls press through crowds of other delights and contentments in pursuit of Christ, whom they prefer before their chief joy. Mary Magdalen sees angels in the sepulchre, but that will not do unless she see Jesus. *Saw you him whom my soul loveth?* Note, We must evince the sincerity of our love to Christ by our solicitous enquiries after him. *The children of the bride-chamber will mourn when the bridegroom is taken away* (^{<895>}Matthew 9:15), especially for the sin which provoked him to withdraw; and, if we do so, we shall be in care to recover the sense of his favour and diligent and constant in the use of proper means in order thereunto. We must search the scriptures, be much in prayer, keep close to ordinances, and all with this upon our heart, *Saw you him whom my soul loveth?* Those only who have seen Christ themselves are likely to direct others to a sight of him. When the Greeks came to worship at the feast they applied to Philip, with such an address as this of the spouse to the watchmen, *Sir, we would see Jesus*, ^{<872>}John 12:21.

IV. How she found him at last, v. 4. She *passed from* the watchmen as soon as she perceived they could give her no tidings of her beloved; she

would not stay with them, because he was not among them, but went on seeking, for (as Ainsworth observes) the society neither of brethren, nor of the church, nor of ministers, can comfort the afflicted conscience unless Christ himself be apprehended by faith. But soon after she parted from the watchmen she found him whom she sought, and then called him *him whom my soul loveth*, with as much delight as before with desire. Note, Those that continue seeking Christ shall find him at last, and when perhaps they were almost ready to despair of finding him. See ^{<B07>}Psalm 42:7, 8; 77:9, 10; ^{<B07>}Isaiah 54:7, 8. Disappointments must not drive us away from gracious pursuits. Hold out, faith and patience; *the vision is for an appointed time*, and, though the watchman can give us no account of it, *at the end it shall itself speak and not lie*; and the comfort that comes in after long waiting, in the use of means, will be so much the sweeter at last.

V. How close she kept to him when she had found him. She is now as much in fear of losing him as before she was in care to find him: *I held him*, held him fast, as the women, when they met with Christ after his resurrection, *held him by the feet, and worshipped him*, ^{<B09>}Matthew 28:9. *“I would not let him go.* Not only, I would never do any thing to provoke him to depart, but I would by faith and prayer prevail with him to stay, and by the exercise of grace preserve inward peace.” Those that know how hard comfort is come by, and how dearly it is bought, will be afraid of forfeiting it and playing it away, and will think nothing too much to do to keep it safe. *Non minor est virtus quam quaerere parta tueri* — *As much is implied in securing our acquisitions as in making them.* Those that have laid hold on wisdom must *retain her*, ^{<B08>}Proverbs 3:18. Those that hold Christ fast in the arms of faith and love shall *not let him go*; he will abide with them.

VI. How desirous she was to make others acquainted with him: *“I brought him to my mother's house*, that all my relations, all who are dear to me, might have the benefit of communion with him.” When Zaccheus found Christ, or rather was found of him, *salvation came to his house*, ^{<B09>}Luke 19:9. Wherever we find Christ we must take him home with us to our houses, especially to our hearts. The church is our mother, and we should be concerned for her interests, that she may have Christ present with her and be earnest in prayer for his presence with his people and ministers always. Those that enjoy the tokens of Christ's favour to their own souls should desire that the church, and all religious assemblies in their public capacity, might likewise enjoy the tokens of his favour.

VII. What care she was in that no disturbance might be given him (v. 5); she repeats the charge she had before given (²¹¹⁶Song of Solomon 2:7) to the *daughters of Jerusalem* not to *stir up or awake her love*. When she *had brought him into her mother's house*, among her sisters, she gives them a strict charge to keep all quiet and in good order, to be very observant of him, careful to please him, and afraid of offending him. The charge given to the church in the wilderness concerning the angel of the covenant, who was among them, explains this. ¹²³²Exodus 23:21, *Beware of him and obey his voice; provoke him not*. See that none of you stir out of your places, lest you disturb him, but *with quietness work and mind your own business; make no noise; let all clamour and bitterness be put far from you*, for that *grieves the Holy Spirit of God*, ⁴⁰⁴³Ephesians 4:30, 31. Some make this to be Christ's charge to the *daughters of Jerusalem* not to disturb or disquiet his church, nor trouble the minds of the disciples; for Christ is very tender of the peace of his church, and all the members of it, even the little ones; and those that trouble them *shall bear their judgment*, ⁴⁸¹⁰Galatians 5:10.

²¹¹⁶SONG OF SOLOMON 3:6

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST

These are the words of the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom the charge was given, v. 5. They had looked shily upon the bride because she was black (²¹¹⁶Song of Solomon 1:6); but now they admire her, and speak of her with great respect: *Who is this?* How beautiful she looks! Who would have expected such a comely and magnificent person to *come out of the wilderness?* As, when Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem, they said, *Who is this?* And of the accession of strangers to the church she herself says, with wonder (²³⁴²Isaiah 49:21), *Who has begotten me these?*

1. This is applicable to the Jewish church, when, after forty years' wandering in the wilderness, they came out of it, to take a glorious possession of the land of promise; and this may very well be illustrated by what Balaam said of them at that time, when they ascended *out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke*, and he stood admiring them: *From the top of the rocks I see him. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* ⁴²¹⁹Numbers 23:9; 24:5.

2. It is applicable to any public deliverance of the church of God, as particularly of Babylon, the Old-Testament and the New-Testament

Babylon; then the church is *like pillars of smoke*, ascending upwards in devout affections, the incense of praise, from which, as from Noah's sacrifice, God *smells a sweet savour*; then she is amiable in the eyes of her friends, and her enemies too cannot but have a veneration for her, and *worship at her feet, knowing that God has loved her*, ^{<663>}Revelation 3:9. Sometimes the *fear of the Jews* was upon their neighbours, when they saw that *God was with them of a truth*, ^{<1087>}Esther 8:17.

3. It is applicable to the recovery of a gracious soul out of a state of desertion and despondency.

(1.) She ascends *out of the wilderness*, the dry and barren land, where there is *no way*, where there is *no water*, where travellers are still in want and ever at a loss; here a poor soul may long be left to wander, but shall come up, at last, under the conduct of the Comforter.

(2.) She comes up *like pillars of smoke*, like a cloud of incense ascending from the altar or the smoke of the burnt-offerings. This intimates a fire of pious and devout affections in the soul, whence this smoke arises, and the mounting of the soul heaven-ward in this smoke (as ^{<1033>}Judges 13:20), the heart lifted up to God in the heavens, *as the sparks fly upward*. Christ's return to the soul gives life to its devotion, and its communion with God is most reviving when it ascends *out of a wilderness*.

(3.) She is *perfumed with myrrh and frankincense*. She is replenished with the graces of God's Spirit, which are as sweet spices, or as the holy incense, which, being now kindled by his gracious returns, sends forth a very fragrant smell. Her devotions being now peculiarly lively, she is not only acceptable to God, but amiable in the eyes of others also, who are ready to cry out with admiration, *Who is this?* What a monument of mercy is this! The graces and comforts with which she is *perfumed* are called the *powders of the merchant*, for they are far-fetched and dear-bought, by our Lord Jesus, that blessed merchant, who took a long voyage, and was at vast expense, no less than that of his own blood, to purchase them for us. They are not the products of our own soil, nor the growth of our own country; no, they are imported from the heavenly Canaan, the better country.

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:7-11

THE LOVE OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST

The daughters of Jerusalem stood admiring the spouse and commending her, but she overlooks their praises, is not puffed up with them, but transfers all the glory to Christ, and directs them to look off from her to him, recommends him to their esteem, and sets herself to applaud him. Here he is three times called *Solomon*, and we have that name but three times besides in all this song, ^{<2115>}Song of Solomon 1:5; 8:11, 12. It is Christ that is here meant, who is greater than Solomon, and of whom Solomon was an illustrious type for his wisdom and wealth, and especially his building the temple.

Three things she admires him for: —

I. The safety of his bed (v. 7): *Behold his bed*, even *Solomon's*, very rich and fine; for such *the curtains of Solomon* were. *His bed*, which is above *Solomon's*, so some read it. Christ's bed, though he had *not where to lay his head*, is better than Solomon's best bed. The church is his bed, for he has said of it. *This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell*. The hearts of believers are his bed, for he lies all night between their breasts, ^{<4017>}Ephesians 3:17. Heaven is his bed, the rest into which he entered when he had done his work. Or it may be meant of the sweet repose and satisfaction which gracious souls enjoy in communion with him; it is called *his bed*, because, though we are admitted to it, and therefore it is called *our bed* (^{<2116>}Song of Solomon 1:16), yet it is his peace that is our rest, ^{<347>}John 14:27. *I will give you rest*, ^{<4118>}Matthew 11:28. It is *Solomon's bed*, whose name signifies *peace*, because in his days Judah and Israel *dwelt safely under their vines and fig-trees*. That which she admires his bed for is the guard that surrounded it. Those that rest in Christ not only dwell at ease (many do so who yet are in the greatest danger) but they dwell in safety. Their holy serenity is under the protection of a holy security. This bed had *threescore valiant men about it*, as yeomen of the guard, or the band of gentlemen-pensioners; they are *of the valiant of Israel*, and a great many bold and brave men David's reign had produced. The life-guard men are well armed: *They all hold swords*, and know how to hold them; they are *expert in war*, well skilled in all the arts of it. They are posted about the bed at a convenient distance. They are in a posture of defence, *every man with his sword upon his thigh* and his hand upon his

sword, ready to draw upon the first alarm, and this *because of fear in the night*, because of the danger feared; for the lives of princes, even the wisest and best, as they are more precious, so they are more exposed, and require to be more guarded than the lives of common persons. Or, *because of the fear* of it, and the apprehension which the spouse may have of danger, these guards are set for her satisfaction, that she may be *quiet from the fear of evil*, which believers themselves are subject to, especially *in the night*, when they are under a cloud as to their spiritual state, or in any outward trouble more than ordinary. Christ himself was under the special protection of his Father in his whole undertaking. *In the shadow of his hand he hid me* (^{234P}Isaiah 49:2); he had legions of angels at his command. The church is well guarded; more are with her than against her. Lest any hurt this vineyard, God himself *keeps it night and day* (^{237P}Isaiah 27:2, 3); particular believers, when they repose themselves in Christ and with him, though it may be night-time with them, and they may have their *fears in the night*, and yet safe, as safe as Solomon himself in the midst of his guards; the angels have a charge concerning them, ministers are appointed to *watch for their souls*, and they ought to be *valiant men, expert in the spiritual warfare*, holding *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, and having that girt *upon their thigh*, always ready to them for the silencing *of the fears* of God's people *in the night*. All the attributes of God are engaged for the safety of believers; they are kept as in a stronghold by his power (^{411B}1 Peter 1:5), are safe in *his name* (^{418B}Proverbs 18:10), his peace protects those in whom it rules (^{504B}Philippians 4:7), and the effect of righteousness in them is *quietness and assurance*, (^{237T}Isaiah 32:17. Our danger is from *the rulers of the darkness of this world*, but we are safe in the *armour of light*.

II. The splendour of his chariot, v. 9, 10. As Christ and believers rest in safety under a sufficient guard, so when they appear publicly, as kings in their coaches of state, they appear in great magnificence. This chariot was of Solomon's own contriving and making, the materials very rich, *silver, and gold, and cedar, and purple*. He made it for himself, and yet made it *for the daughters of Jerusalem*, to oblige them. Some by this *chariot*, or *coach*, or *chaise* (the word is nowhere else used in scripture), understand the human nature of Christ, in which the divine nature rode as in an open chariot. It was a divine workmanship (*A body hast thou prepared me*); the structure was very fine, but that which was at the bottom of it was love, pure love to the children of men. Others make it to represent the everlasting gospel, in which, as in an open chariot, Christ shows himself,

and as in a chariot of war rides forth triumphantly, *conquering and to conquer*. The pillars, the seven pillars (²⁰⁰¹Proverbs 9:1), are of *silver*, for the words of the Lord are *as silver tried* (³⁰⁰⁶Psalm 12:6), nay, they are better *than thousands of gold and silver*. It is hung with *purple*, a princely colour; all the adornings of it are dyed in the precious blood of Christ, and that gives them this colour. But that which completes the glory of it is *love*; *it is paved with love*, it is lined with love, not love of strangers, as Solomon's was in the days of his defection, but *love of the daughters of Jerusalem*, a holy *love*. Silver is better than cedar, gold than silver, but love is better than gold, better than all, and it is put last, for nothing can be better than that. The gospel is all *love*. Mr. Durham applies it to the covenant of redemption, the way of our salvation, as it is contrived in the eternal counsel of God, and manifested to us in the scriptures. This is that work of Christ himself wherein the glory of his grace and love to sinners most eminently appears, and which makes him amiable and admirable in the eyes of believers. In this covenant love is conveyed to them, and they are carried in it to the perfection of love, and, as it were, ride in triumph. It is admirably framed and contrived, both for the glory of Christ and for the comfort of believers. It is *well ordered in all things, and sure* (¹²¹⁵2 Samuel 23:5); it has *pillars* that cannot be shaken, it is *made of the wood of Lebanon*, which can never rot; the basis of it is *gold*, the most lasting metal; the blood of the covenant, that rich *purple*, is the cover of this chariot, by which believers are sheltered from the wind and storms of divine wrath, and the troubles of this world; but the midst of it, and that which is all in all in it, is *love*, that *love of Christ which surpasses knowledge* and the dimensions of which are immeasurable.

III. The lustre of his royal person, when he appears in his greatest pomp, v. 11. Here observe,

1. The call that is given to the *daughters of Zion* to acquaint themselves with the glories of *king Solomon*: *Go forth, and behold him*. The multitude of the spectators adds to the beauty of a splendid cavalcade. Christ, in his gospel, manifests himself. Let each of us add to the number of those that give honour to him, by giving themselves the satisfaction of looking upon him. Who should pay respects to Zion's king but Zion's daughters? They have reason to rejoice greatly when he comes, ³⁰⁰⁰Zechariah 9:9.

(1.) *Behold him* then. Look with pleasure upon Christ in his glory. Look upon him with an eye of faith, with a fixed eye. Here is a sight worth

seeing; *behold*, and admire him, *behold*, and love him; look upon him, and know him again.

(2.) *Go forth and behold* him; go off from the world, as those that see no beauty and excellency in it in comparison with what is to be seen in the Lord Jesus. Go out of yourselves, and let the light of his transcendent beauty put you out of conceit with yourselves. *Go forth* to the place where he is to be seen, to the street through which he passes, as Zaccheus.

2. The direction that is given them to take special notice of that which they would not see every day, and that was his *crown*, either the crown of gold, adorned with jewels, which he wore on his coronation-day (Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, though she did not procure that for him, yet, by her reasonable interposal, she helped to secure it to him when Adonijah was catching at it), or the garland or crown of flowers and green tied with ribbons which his mother made for him, to adorn the solemnity of his nuptials. Perhaps Solomon's coronation day was his marriage-day, *the day of his espousals*, when the garland his mother crowned him with was added to the crown his people crowned him with. Applying this to Christ, it speaks,

(1.) The many honours put upon him, and the power and dominion he is entrusted with: *Go forth*, and see king Jesus, *with the crown wherewith his Father crowned him*, when he declared him his *beloved Son*, in whom he was *well-pleased*, when he *set him as King upon his holy hill of Zion*, when he advanced him to his own right hand, and invested him with a sovereign authority, both *in heaven and in earth*, and *put all things under his feet*.

(2.) The dishonour put upon him by his persecutors. Some apply it to the *crown of thorns* with which *his mother*, the Jewish church, *crowned him* on the day of his death, which was *the day of his espousals* to his church, when he *loved it, and gave himself for it* (⁴⁹⁵Ephesians 5:25); and it is observable that when he was *brought forth wearing the crown of thorns* *Pilate said*, and said it to the *daughters of Zion*, *Behold the man*.

(3.) It seems especially to mean the honour done him by his church, as his mother, and by all true believers, in whose hearts he is formed, and of whom he has said, *These are my mother, my sister, and brother*, ⁴⁹³Matthew 12:50. They give him the glory of his undertaking; to him is

glory in the church, <021> Ephesians 3:21. When believers accept of him as theirs, and join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant,

[1.] It is his coronation-day in their souls. Before conversion they were crowning themselves, but then they begin to crown Christ, and continue to do so from that day forward. They appointed him their head; they bring *every thought into obedience to him*; they set up his throne in their hearts, and cast all their crowns at his feet.

[2.] It is *the day of his espousals*, in which he betroths them to him for ever in lovingkindness and in mercies, joins them to himself in faith and love, and gives himself to them in the promises and all he has, to be theirs. *Thou shalt not be for another, so will I also be for thee*, <022> Hosea 3:3. And to him they are presented as *chaste virgins*.

[3.] It is *the day of the gladness of his heart*; he is pleased with the honour that his people do him, pleased with the progress of his interest among them. Does *Satan fall* before them? *In that hour Jesus rejoices in spirit*, <023> Luke 10:18, 21. There is joy in heaven over repenting sinners; the family is glad when the prodigal son returns. *Go forth and behold Christ's grace toward sinners, as his crown, his brightest glory*.