

GOOD NEWS

A Collection of Sermons

by

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SERMON THIRTEEN

THE ROSE OF SHARON

(Morning Service at Chicago Avenue Church)

Sam Small spoke as follows: The first verse of the second chapter of the Song of Solomon reads:

“I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley.”

This is the declaration of Christ as given us by the wise man, representing by figurative language His attitude in this world, and suggesting to us some of the qualities and attributes of His character as a man acquired in his relations to the church. And we, if we desire to conform ourselves to Christ, if we desire to have His spirit, if we desire to have the attributes which

SHINE MOST PRE-EMINENTLY

in His character, and whose possession will give to us somewhat of the Christlike character in our life and in our efforts, in our association with our fellow-men, and in our relations to the church to which we belong on earth, we must be like Him, like the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley.

And in considering what Christ means, in considering the signification which is wrapped up in this declaration, we will consider first:

What are the qualities of the rose? Of these qualities there are three that stand up prominently and easily distinguishable, and which are sufficient for our purpose. If we look at them in their proper relations, they are those which give to the rose its value, and make it so acceptable a flower to all creation.

In the first place, the rose is perfect. Perhaps nowhere in all nature do we find examples so general in their character and so perfect in their character as the roses furnish, or a rose so perfect as the rose of Sharon. The rose is symmetrically constructed. It is evolved and run out in all its characteristics by a regular order, which the botanist has described and shown to us.

And so perfect is the rose in

IT'S NATURAL STATE

that nothing made in imitation of it can be mistaken for it. It is said Zeuxis, in ancient Greece, painted grapes looking so like the natural ones that birds came to pick at them; but no one has ever painted a rose so that the humming-bird would come and try to extract the sweetness from it.

A rose is perfect in its form; so much so that, however skilful a lady may be in the imitation of them — and I have seen them wonderfully skilful — yet no artificial rose was ever made to compare with the beautiful bloom; and if a skilful photograph of one of these artificial roses is given to a skilful botanist, the latter will tell you from the photograph that it is not a natural but an artificial one. Nature has so ordered her construction works that she can be detected even in a photograph.

So a Christian character, like the rose, should be perfect; and that is what was intended to be taught us in Solomon's saying, namely, that in our Christian character we should be perfect; that in our Christian character we should have all the attributes and all the qualities of a Christian character so connectedly and so constructively put together in our character as that the whole shall be symmetrical and shall be perfect. Nothing should be missing. The very moment that you take from a rose one of its leaves you take away the

ORDER OF ITS CONSTRUCTION

something is missing that ought to be there; something whose absence mars the perfection, and mars its symmetry, and lessens its beauty. So when you take away from the Christian character any of those qualities, any of those attributes and belongings which are proper and appropriate and necessary to its perfection, you mar the symmetry of that Christian character, and disturb its regular order, and make of it an imperfect character.

When we look at the Christian graces, at all the things that a Christian ought to mean; when we consider their catalogue, and catalogue those things that they should be constantly performing, and those that we should not commit, we find them grouping themselves around a common center, and that they will be like the leaves of an open rose, perfect in their character, and distributing its perfume like the rose, and showing the sweetness of the Christian character.

And the reason that the humming-bird never mistakes one from the other is because it is attracted by the sweetness of the real rose's perfume, and in the absence of that thing in the picture it never goes near it.

So in the picture of the Christian character, if it has in it Christ and all the sweet characteristics that make it a sweet flower to this fallen world, so will this Christian character have in it that sweetness that will

MAKE IT ATTRACTIVE

To all mankind.

How often have we seen a good old mother who had a perfect Christian character, sweet in her temper, gentle in her disposition, generous in her sympathy, and kind to everybody that came within the radiance of her influence? You recognize the sweetness of her character. You admire it, you praise it, and she is loved by all wherever she goes. In her presence care and sorrow, the weary and the woe-worn, break into smiles. The rigid lines break into lines of resignation and peace, and all her influence, wherever she went, was that of sweetness, kindness, and gentleness, and she was like a perfume in whatever atmosphere she went into.

You liked to be where she was. You liked to be within the radiance of her influence. You liked to be near her. You liked to hear her words. You liked to have her gentle sympathy. You liked to know that you was in harmony with her, and that she was considerate of you; that she was with you in spirit. I have seen myself some men who in all the outgoings of their lives were sweet; their influence gentle, peaceful, ennobling in its character; men of kind disposition; men of sympathizing words and hearts; men who went about the world literally doing good, and shedding a good influence about them wherever they went, and this influence not only

PERVADES THEIR CHARACTER

While here, but, like the perfume of the rose, it will remain with us after they are dead and gone.

You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, But the scent of the rose will cling to it still. So with the good man and the good woman who have a sweet flavor. When they are taken away the sweetness of their lives remains after them, a sweet, precious influence lingering near, year after year, after they have gone to their account.

Another attribute of the rose is the fact of its universality. Go where you will in the world, almost, and you can find the rose. It is common to nearly all the latitudes of the globe. In some shape or character we find it wherever we travel, and I believe that no traveler has ever gone, within the lines of human life, and where it is possible for him to live, where the rose is not found to bloom and flourish when proper care is taken of it.

Christianity ought to be the universal practice of the world. Its light ought to be the light of the world. There will come a time, a season, when all nations shall bow to Christ, and His influence be the pervading influence of the world, and His principles the dominating influence of mankind, just as the rose is now the universal flower — it may be said — of the entire world.

There is another thing about the rose. It is that it is

COMMON TO ALL PEOPLE

You never see people so poor that they cannot have roses about them if they like to have them. You go along the streets of a great city and look up at a sixth-story window where a poor seamstress lives, or a man has his room, under the roof, and out on the ledge will be seen a flower-bed.

So in the gardens of the rich, as in the humble grass-plot of the poor — wherever we go, those who love flowers can have the roses, their sweetness and their perfume, and their presence with us. That is one reason why we have missionary workers; that is one reason why we have church missions, and home missions, and foreign missions.

It is that Christians in the church may demonstrate this quality of universality, and that they may not take all the Christianity and all the religion they have and keep it shut up in their own bosom: that instead of doing this they shall make it a pervading influence about them, and make others welcome to it.

And we have our home missions in order that good Christians who are doing their duty may have conveniences and opportunities for spreading their Christian influence; and just in proportion that a church has an active missionary spirit, just in that proportion will its influence be felt in that community; and just in proportion as Christianity is

A VALUABLE ACQUIREMENT

to men, just in proportion as it is a precious principle on which men can act, just in that proportion will the world outside begin to look upon you, and see your works shining through you and exhibiting the light in you.

So it is that our church people send forward out into the world educated and experienced and trained missionaries, and send them into heathen lands. People object to it as a waste of money. They ask why not confine it to our homes where it is needed most? What are we sending it off for to missionaries abroad? They think it a waste of money.

You will find, as a general rule that a man who is opposed to foreign missions is also opposed to home missions. He is “agin” missions in general.

We must have missionary work. We must do that which Christ commanded us to do: “**Go ye into all of the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,**” and, God be praised, we have sent from America into all the heathen lands of the world some of the grandest missionaries that the world has ever seen. We are sending them every year. We are educating, training, keeping them, and I believe that our workers among the heathen people are the grandest heroes and heroines that the world owns to-day.

But the world does not know it.

The world does not recognize it. But the world takes gladly the

RESULTS OF THEIR WORK

When Christianity succeeds in prevailing over the passions of the people of a heathen land, they will continue to do as they did in the case of the Sandwich Islands, and reap the harvest of, and profits from, the work of those humble missionaries.

Christ said, “**I am the lily of the valley;**” and the lily has two prominent characteristics which He would have Christians have. And the first of these is humility — the humility of the lily of the valley. The very name gives it the idea of humility — humble before God. It is the humility of the lily of the valley growing under the shadow of a friendly leaf; of the lily of the valley having its abode in the little places.

Humility, however, does not mean to be abject and cowardly before men. But we should be humble before God. That is the only time humility in this world is worth anything. The humility that makes us humble in all things before God is what we want. Humility before men is unworthy of the church. There are very few men in this world that are worth being humble before. And the grandest triumphs that Christianity has ever seen in the whole history of the world have been the triumphs of those Christian men that were heroes and martyrs for their religion, and

REFUSED TO BE HUMBLE

In the face of men that had power, and influence, and the ability, and the desire to coerce and persecute and kill them, Christ don't want His people, His followers in this world, to be cowards. He don't want you to be so humble and low down as to let the chariot wheels of sin run over your neck. He don't want you to shrink into the corner and let the devil get hold of your neck and do as he pleases. He wants you to be humble before God, and contriving all things to his favor; and, in humility, to go forward, and let His father lead you as He wills; going in this way in perfect obedience, as He did, the only perfectly obedient man in this world.

Humility in this world to God is one of the most becoming of the characteristics of any man. But humility before men is never admirable, and finally becomes despicable. And Christians ought to have courage. That is one of the grand traits and elements of his character. He ought to have manliness, because the closer that he conforms his life to the manly Christ, the more nearly he attains to. His stature and His independence and His superiority over men; and there is not a man in all the countries of God that a perfect Christian is not superior to, or the equal of; and no man is

HIS EQUAL

Excepting it be a man who is as good a Christian as he is. And this idea of Christians cringing and scraping and giving way to the devil is despicable. My Christianity makes me humble before God. I want at all times to feel that humility to be able at all times to get down on my knees and make, there and then, my submission to God, and express my willingness to take up the duties of obedience to God, to recognize Him as my sovereign Master. But in reference to men, I want my Christianity to give them the purpose and the courage to do right; to do justly toward my fellowmen; to give him all things to which they have a right, and to show their children tenderness and love and kindness.

And then I want that Christianity shall follow out its motto, and have other men do unto me as I do unto them; and I will take nothing less, because to take anything less from a man is to disgrace your Christianity and your profession in Christ.

And if my Christianity should not put me on the same plane and level with all the rest of the world, the highest of them, and enable me to demand my rights in return for my giving him his rights, it would not be a fit Christianity to live on. And the thing which most grandly distinguishes Christianity is the denial that

MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

Is that Christianity makes man do right to others for the love of it. And this is the grand rule, **“Love thy neighbor as thyself.”** Humility before God, independence among men, a spirit to overcome all that is evil, unjust, untrue, and intolerable in its character.

And the other attribute of Christianity is its purity. We have discussed before at length this subject of purity; we know what purity is, what Christian purity is, and wherein we defile ourselves when we leave this standard of Christian purity; and there is no Christian character complete until we have purity — purity of act and purity of thought. I will not think evil. I will not do evil. Purity of hearing! I will not hear evil. I will not become the receiver of scandal and stolen goods.

The man who is going through this world, or the woman who is living in the society of these days, and stealing from his or her neighbor their good name and their good character, steals more than their money, and he or she who steals a neighbor’s good character and their good qualities and their good name, and then goes and tries to make my ear the repository of these stolen goods, is endeavoring to make me an accessory to the crime before God. And I won’t hear it; and I would as soon be offended at his offering me that, as I would if he

OFFERED ME STOLEN GOODS

and feel as ashamed of being found in possession of it as I would if found in possession of stolen property by the man who stole it.

Purity of speech!

I will not speak those things that are blasphemous, that are improper; I will not speak those things that will produce dissension, anger, and strife. I am under obligation not to do it. I will not speak those things that will take away people’s good names. I will not speak those things that will produce grief and sorrow in the breast of my neighbor. I will set him thinking upon things that are lovable, and sympathize with him, and try to improve myself in the things that are commended to me in the Scriptures.

We can find in all our neighbors much good to see if we will only hunt for it. The trouble is that we are unwilling to hunt, to look for the good that is in them. We know that the good things about our neighbors have very little currency in the world; and if we want to know much about our neighbors and be popular for our information we want to know about the evil of the world; and the more we know of it the more popular will we be, because people are always seeking for those things, and a man who is a popular walking encyclopedia of scandal and of the bad-fame

HISTORY OF CHICAGO

Will be the most popular man in Chicago. Mrs. Tom and Mrs. Dick and Mrs. Harry, and Mr. Tom and Mr. Dick and Mr. Harry, the world wants to know all about them. That man and that woman who can overcome the disposition to talk about their neighbors is a hero and a heroine, so it is declared in the Holy Scriptures.

If you can master and control your tongue, you have the assurance that you are greater than he that taketh a city, for the human tongue has destroyed many and many a city in this world. One word of treachery has battered down the walls of the best fortified cities in the world, and consigned the inhabitants over to rapine and slaughter.

Keep your tongue pure. Keep your speech, your heart, pure. Keep your affections set upon those things that are lovely, and let them not go out, as do the natural lusts of the fleshly and carnal man, after those things that are impure. The worst job in the world is to handle pitch with the purpose of bleaching it. Pitch was made to be black, and was made for

PEOPLE WHO ARE BLACK IN SIN

Christians who are pure and dressed in the garments of righteousness have no right to go about trying to reform pitch and to make it white. You might as soon attempt to convert a black bird into a white one. Let your thoughts carry you into paths of pleasure and works that are good and charitable and that are ennobling to the character.

And when you have all these things you may be pretty well sure that there is not much else left to make you perfect. With the attributes of the rose and the lily of the valley you have covered all the five points of the star of the Christian — perfection, sweetness, universality, humility, and purity.

May God bless us all this morning and give us the mind and the heart to seek for these things; and those who will endeavor to have such Christian lives as that, let them raise their hands.

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