

THE FEAST OF THE LORD

NO. 226

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BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.**

*“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.*

I HAD exhausted my time this morning by describing the feast of Satan—how at the four tables, where the profligate sat, the self-righteous, the worldly and the secretly sinful. The course of Satan, was always on this wise—first the good wine and when men had well drunk, that which was worse. His feast diminished in its value as it proceeded and went from the bright crackling of the thorn under the pot to the blackness of darkness forever. I had then in my second point to show that the rule of Christ’s banquet is just the very reverse—that Christ does always give the best wine last—that He does save the good things until the end of the feast. Not that sometimes the first cups at the table of Christ are full of wormwood and gall and are exceedingly bitter, but that if we tarry at the feast, they will grow sweeter and sweeter and sweeter, until at last, when we shall come into the land Beulah and especially when we shall enter into the city of our God, we shall be compelled to say, “You have kept the good wine until now.”

Now, my dear Friends, this is a great fact, that Christ’s feast increases in sweetness. When first the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed a feast for the sons of men, the first cup He set upon the table was but a very little one and it had in it but few words of consolation. You remember the inscription upon that ancient vessel, the first cup of consolation that was ever held to the sons of men—“The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” There was to them but little sweetness there—much to us, because we can understand it better and some to them, because God’s Spirit might help them to understand it, but still in the revelation of it there seemed but little promise. As the world went on, there were greater cups of precious wine brought forth, whereof Patriarchs and ancient saints did drink. But Beloved, all the wine they ever had under the Old Testament dispensation was far behind that of which *we* drink. He that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is more highly favored than he who is chief under the Old Testament dispensation.

Our fathers ate manna, but we eat the Bread that came down from Heaven. They drank of water in the wilderness, but we drink of that Living Water whereof if a man drinks he shall never thirst. It is true they had much sweetness. The cups of the ancient tabernacle had precious wine in them. There was in the outward symbol the sign and the shadow—much that was delightful to the faith of the true Believer. But we must remember that we are drinking today of that wine which Prophets and kings desired to drink, but died without a taste. They guessed its sweetness. They could by faith foresee what it would be. But lo, we are allowed to sit at the table and quaff full draughts of wines on the lees well refined, which God has given to us in this mountain, wherein He has made a feast of fat things for all people.

But, Beloved, the text still stands true of us—there is better wine to come. We are in our privileges superior to Patriarchs and kings and Prophets. God has given us a brighter and a clearer day than they had; theirs was but the twilight of the morning, compared with the noonday which we enjoy. But think not that we are come to the best wine yet. There are more noble banquets for God’s Church. Who knows how long before the best of the precious wine shall be broached? Do you not know that the King of Heaven is coming again upon this earth? Jesus Christ, who came once and broached His heart for us on Calvary, is coming again, to flood the earth with glory. He came once with a sin-offering in His hand—behold, He comes no more with a sin-offering, but with the cup of salvation and of thanksgiving, to call upon the name of the Lord and joyously to take unto Himself the throne of His father David. You and I, if we are alive and remain, shall yet set that cup to our lips. And if we die, we have this privilege, this happy consolation, that we shall not be behind hand, for “the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible,” and we shall drink of that millennial wine which Christ our Savior has reserved to the last.

Saints! You cannot tell what golden goblets those are of which you shall drink in the thousand years of the Redeemer's triumph. You cannot tell what wine, sparkling and red, that shall be, which shall come from the vintage of the hills of glory, when he whose garments are red with treading the wine-press shall descend in the great day and stand upon the earth. Why, the very thought of this cheered Job. "I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth—and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." Let this rejoice and cheer you, Christian, that the good wine is kept even unto that time.

And now, having shown that this is the rule of Christ in the great dispensation which He uses to all His Church I shall come to the subject of this evening, which is this—First, the fact that the Believer shall find that Christ keeps for him the best wine till the last. Secondly, the reason of Christ for so doing. And thirdly, the lesson which we ought to learn from there.

I. First, THE FACT THAT CHRIST KEEPS HIS GOOD WINE TILL LAST. I was thinking as I rode here how very true this is of some of God's people. Why there are some of God's best Beloved who have their names upon the breast-plate of the great High Priest, who are purchased with His blood and are very dear to his soul. And yet they who have not known from their youth up what it is to get out of the depths of poverty. They have to live from hand to mouth, not knowing one day where another meal shall come. How many more there are of God's people that are lying on beds of affliction? Some of the most precious of God's diamonds are lying on the dunghill of disease. You may go and climb to many a chamber where you shall see the victims of all kinds of diseases, loathsome, protracted and painful and you shall see God's dear ones languishing out a dying life.

I might point you to others of God's servants, whose days are spent in toil. There is needed for the human body and especially for the soul, a little rest and a little of the food of knowledge. But these have had so little instruction that they cannot get mental food ready for themselves. If they read they can scarce understand and they have hard bondage in this life, which makes their life bitter and hinders them from knowledge. They have to work from morning to night, with scarce a moments rest. Oh, Beloved, will it not be true of them, when death shall give them their discharge, when they shall leave this world, which has been to them, with an emphasis, a vale of tears? Will not they have to say—"You have kept the good wine until now"?

Oh, what a change for her who has come limping along these many Sabbath days to the sanctuary! For there she shall go no more up to the Lord's house limping and lame, but the "lame man shall leap like the hart," and like Miriam, she shall dance with the daughters of Israel. Ah, you may have had to suffer sickness and sorrow and pain, blindness and deafness and a thousand of this world's ills—what a change for you, when you find them all gone! No racking pains, no pining want, no anxious care. You shall not have to cry for the sunlight to penetrate your abodes, or weep because your sight is failing through incessant labor with that murderous needle. No, you shall see the light of God, brighter than the light of the sun and you shall rejoice in the beams that proceed from His countenance.

You shall have no more infirmities—immortality shall have covered and swallowed them up—that which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power. That which was sown disordered, full of pain and sorrow and disjointed and full of agony, shall be raised full of delectable delights, no more capable of anguish, quivering with joy and bliss unspeakable. You shall no more be poor. You shall be rich, richer than the miser's dream. You shall no more have to labor, there shall you rest upon your beds, each one of you walking in your uprightness. You shall no more suffer from neglect and scorn and ignominy and persecution. You shall be glorified with Christ, in the day when He shall come to be admired of them that love Him. What a change for such! The best wine, indeed, is kept to the last, in their case, for they have never had any good wine here to the eyes of men, though secretly they have had many a drink from the bottle of Jesus. He has often put His cordial cup to their lips. They have been like the ewe lamb that belonged to the man in Nathan's parable—they have drunk out of Christ's own cup on the earth, but still even sweeter than that cup shall be the draught which they shall receive at the last.

But, my dear Friends, although I put these first, as especially feeling the change, because we can see the difference, yet will it be true of the most favored of God's children, all of them shall say, "The best wine is kept till now." Of all the men whom I might envy, I think I should first of all envy the Apostle Paul. What a man! How highly favored! How greatly gifted! How much blessed! Ah, Paul, you could talk of revelations and of visions from on high. He heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter,

and he saw that which few eyes have ever seen. He was caught up into the third Heaven. What draughts of joy the Apostle Paul must have had! What looking into the deep things of God! What soaring into the heights of Heaven! Perhaps there was never a man who was more favored of God. To have his mind expanded and then to have it filled full with the wisdom and the revelation of the knowledge of the Most High.

But ask the Apostle Paul whether he believes there is anything better to come and he tells you, “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then shall we see face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known.” He was evidently expecting something more than he had received. And, Brethren, he was not disappointed. There was a Heaven as much above all the enjoyments of Paul, as the enjoyments of Paul were above the depressions of his spirit, when he said, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” There are children of God who have all that they can need of this world’s goods. They seem to be free from earthly care and they have faith enough to trust their God with regard to the future. Their faith is firm and strong. They have much love to the Redeemer. They are engaged in some delightful work and the Holy Spirit attends that work with great success. Their days follow steadily one after another, like the waves of the still calm sea. God is with them and they are greatly blessed. They spread out their roots by the river, their leaf also does not wither and whatsoever they do, they prosper. Whichever way they turn their hand the Lord their God is with them. In whatsoever land they put their feet they are like Joshua, that land is given to them to be an inheritance to them forever.

But, Beloved, even these shall see greater things than they have as yet beheld. High as their Master has taken them into the house of banqueting, lofty though the room is in which they now feast, the Master shall say to them, “Come up higher.” They shall know more, enjoy more, feel more, do more, possess more. They shall be nearer to Christ. They shall have richer enjoyments and sweeter employments than they have had. And they shall feel that their Master has kept his good wine even until now.

Entering into particulars for a moment, very briefly, I must just observe that there are many aspects under which we may regard the heavenly state. And in each of these we shall have to say that Christ has kept the good wine until then. Here on earth the Believer esters into rest by faith—the Christian enjoys rest even in the wilderness. The promise is fulfilled—“they shall dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.” God gives to His Beloved sleep. There is a peace that passes all understanding, which we may enjoy even in this land of turmoil, strife and alarms—a peace which the worldling knows not of, nor can he guess it—

*“A holy calm within the heart,
The pledge of glorious rest.
Which for the Church of God remains,
The end of cares, the end of pain.”*

But, Beloved, drink as we may of the cup of peace, the good wine is kept until a future time. The peace we drink today is dashed with drops of bitter. There are disturbing thoughts, the cares of this world will come, doubts will arise—live as we may in this world, we must have disquietudes, thorns in the flesh must come. But, oh, the rest that remains for the people of God! What good wine shall that be! God has a sun without a spot, a sky without a cloud, a day without a night, a sea without a wave, a world without a tear. Happy are they who, having passed through this world, have entered into rest and ceased from their own works, as God did from His, bathing their weary souls in seas of heavenly rest.

View Heaven under another aspect. It is a place of holy company. In this world we have had some good wine of sweet company. We can tell of many of the precious sons of Zion with whom we have taken sweet counsel. Blessed be the Lord—the righteous have not all failed from among men. Some of you can remember golden names that were very dear to you in the days of your youth—of men and women with whom you used to go up to God’s House and take sweet counsel. Ah, what words used to drop from their lips and what sweet balm you had in the days of your sorrow when they comforted and consoled you. And you have friends still left to whom you look up with some degree of reverence, while they look upon you with intense affection. There are some men that are comforters to your soul and when you talk to them you feel that their heart answers to your heart and that you can enjoy union and communion with them.

But Beloved, the good wine is kept till the last. All the fellowship with the saints that we have had here is as nothing compared with what we are to enjoy in the world to come. How sweet it is for us to recollect that in Heaven we shall be in the company of the best men, the noblest men, the most mighty men, the most honorable and the most renowned. We shall sit with Moses and talk with him of all his life of wonders. We shall walk with Joseph and we shall hear from him of

the Grace that kept him in his hour of Peril. I doubt not you and I shall have the privilege of sitting by the side of David and hearing him recount the perils and the deliverances through which he passed. The saints of Heaven make but one communion. They are not divided into separate classes. We shall be allowed to walk through all the glorious ranks and hold fellowship with all of them. Nor need we doubt but that we shall be able to know them all. There are many reasons which I could not now enumerate, for it would occupy too much time, that seem to my mind to settle the point that in Heaven we shall know even as we are known and shall perfectly know each other and that, indeed, makes us long to be there. “The general assembly and Church of the first-born, whose names are written in Heaven.”

Oh, to get away from this poor Church here, that is full of strifes and divisions and bickering and jealousies and animosities—to get away from the society of men that are full of infirmities, although they have much Grace and to get into a place where there shall be no infirmities in those with whom we talk—no hasty tempers—where we cannot possibly strike a chord that would make a jarring note—when it shall not be in our power to raise among those holy birds of Paradise a cause of strife—when we shall walk in the midst of them all and see love beaming from every eye and feel that deep affection is seated in every heart. Oh, that will be the best wine! Are you not longing to drink of it?—to enter into that great Church fellowship and attend those glorious Church meetings?—

*“Where all the chosen race
Shall meet around the Throne,
To bless the conduct of His Grace,
And make His wonders known.”*

Again—look at Heaven, if you will, in the point of knowledge. We know very much on earth that makes us happy. Jesus Christ has taught us many things that give us joy and gladness. It is a world of ignorance, but still through Grace we have entered into the school of the Gospel and we have learned some sweet truths. It is true we are very much like the boy who is beginning to write. We had to make many ugly pothooks and hangers and we have not yet learned to write the sweet running hand of joy. But nevertheless, the Lord has taught us some great truths to fill our heart with joy—the great doctrine of election, the knowledge of our redemption, the fact of our security in Christ. These great but simple doctrines have filled our hearts with bliss. But, Brethren, the best wine is kept till the last, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall take the book and break the seals thereof and permit us to read it all. Then shall we rejoice indeed, for the best wine will be at our lips. There are old cases of knowledge that contain the richest wine and Christ shall stave them in and we shall drink of them to the full. It is not fit that we should know all things now—we could not bear many things and therefore Christ keeps them back. But—

*“There shall you see and hear and know
All you desired or wished below,
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.”*

You may, if you please, look at Heaven in another sense—as a place of manifestations and of joys. Now this world is a place of manifestations to the Believer. Shall I venture for a moment, or even for a second, to talk of manifestations of Himself which Christ is pleased to afford to His poor children on earth? No, Beloved, your own experience shall supply my lack. I will only say that there are times when the Lord Jesus said unto His Beloved, “Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards. Let us see if the vines flourish, whether the tender grape appears and the pomegranates bud forth—there will I give you My loaves.” But what must be the fellowship of Heaven? I fail tonight in attempting to talk to you of the best wine for this simple reason—I believe there are very few men that can preach of Heaven so as to interest you much, for you feel that all we can say is so far behind the reality, that we might as well have let it alone.

Baxter might write a Saint’s Rest, but I am no Baxter—would God I were! The day may come perhaps when I may talk more copiously of these blessings. But at present, in my own soul, when I begin to talk of the communion of Heaven, I seem overcome, I cannot imagine it. For the next thought that always succeeds my first attempt to think of it, is a thought of overwhelming gratitude, coupled with a kind of fear that this is too good for such an unworthy worm as I. It was a privilege for John to put his head on the Master’s bosom, but that is nothing compared with the privilege of lying in His embrace forever. Oh, we must wait until we get there and as one of old said, “In five minutes you shall know more of Heaven than I could tell you in all my life.” It needs but that we should see our Lord, that we should fly into His arms,

that we should feel His embrace, that we should fall at His feet and, was I about to say, weep for joy? No, that were impossible, but lie there, as it were dissolved away in ecstasy—to feel that we at least have arrived in that dear place which He has spoken to us of when He said—“Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house there are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” Truly He has kept the best wine until the last.

II. And now, WHAT IS OUR LORD’S REASON FOR DOING THIS? That was the second point. Very briefly. The Lord might have given us the best wine last, but He will not act as the devil does. He will always make a broad distinction between His dealings and the dealings of Satan.

Again—He will not give us the best wine first, because that is not His good pleasure. “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” That is the only reason why you will get it at all. And the reason why you do not receive it now is because it is not your Father’s good pleasure that you should have it just yet. Again. Your Father does not give you the good wine now, because He is giving you an appetite for it. At the old feasts of the Romans men used to drink bitter things and all kinds of singular and noxious mixtures, to make them thirsty. Now, in this world, God is, as it were, making His children thirsty, that they may take deeper draughts of Heaven. I cannot think that Heaven would be so sweet to me if I had not first to dwell on earth. Who knows best the sweet of rest? Is it not the laborer? Who understands best the joy of peace? Is it not the man who has dwelt in the land of war? Who knows most the sweetness of joy? Is it not the man who has passed through a world of sorrow? You are having your appetites sharpened by these trials. You are being made ready to receive the fullness of joy that is at the presence of God forever.

Again—the Lord has this also in view. He is making you fit for the best wine, that He may be glorified by the trial of your faith. If it were in my power to go to Heaven tonight and I could enter there, yet if I should have a suspicion that there was more to do or more to suffer here, I would infinitely prefer to wait my Father’s time, because, methinks, in Heaven we shall bless God for all we have suffered. When it is all over, how sweet it will be to talk of it! When you and I shall meet each other in the streets of Heaven—and there are some of you that have had but few trials, but few doubts and fears and tribulations and conflicts—you will talk of how God delivered you. But you will not be able to talk as some of the tried saints will. Ah, what sweet stories some of them will tell! I should like to go by the side of Jonah and hear how he went down to the bottom of the mountains and how he thought the earth with her bars was about him forever.

And Jeremiah—I often think what a deal we shall get out of Jeremiah in eternity—what he will have to tell, who took such plunges into the sea of sorrow! And David, too, the sweet Psalmist, so full of experience he will never have done talking of what the Lord has done for him! And I think you and I, when we get to Heaven, will have enough to think of. As a poor woman once said, when she was in great doubt and fear whether she should be saved at all—she said in her prayer, “Lord, if You will save me, only one thing I can promise You. If You will take me to Heaven You shall never hear the last of it, for I will praise You while immortality lasts and I will tell the angels that You saved ME.” And this is the constant burden of Heaven. They are each one amazed that he is there. Beloved, if we did not have to pass through these trials and troubles and these soul conflicts and such like we should have very little to talk about in Heaven. I have no doubt that the babes in paradise are as happy as the rest, but I do not wish to be a babe in paradise. I bless God I did not go to Heaven when an infant—I shall have the more to praise God for, when I shall look back through a life of mercies, a life of trials and yet a life of sustaining Grace—there will be a louder song, because the deeper have been our troubles. These, I think, are some of God’s reasons.

III. And now, dear Brothers and Sisters, what shall I say about the LESSON WE ARE TO LEARN FROM THIS FACT of Christ keeping the best wine until now? Going home the other night I noticed the difference between the horse’s pace in coming here and going home and I thought to myself, “Ah, the horse goes well, because he is going home.” And the thought struck me, “How well a Christian ought to go, because he is going home.” You know, if we were going *from* home, every rough stone in the road might check us and we might need a good deal of whip to make us go. But it is *going* home. Bless God, every step we take is going home. It may be knee-deep in trouble, but it is all on the road. We may be ankle-deep in fear, but it is going home. I may stumble, but I always stumble homewards. All my afflictions and griefs, when they cast me down, but cast me onwards towards Heaven. The mariner does not mind the waves, if every wave sends him nearer his haven and he does not care how loudly the winds howl, if they only blow him nearer port. That is the

Christian's happy lot—he is going homeward. Let that cheer you, Christian, and make you travel on joyfully, not needing the whip to urge you to duty, but always going on with alacrity through duty and through trial, because you are going homeward.

Again—if we have the best things to come, dear Friends, do not let us be discontented. Let us put up with a few of the bad things now, for they only seem to be so. A traveler who is on a journey in a hurry, if he has to stay for a night at an inn, he may grumble a little at the want of accommodation, but he does not say very much, because he is off tomorrow—he is only stopping a short time at the inn. He says, “I shall get home tomorrow night,” and then he thinks of the joys of home and does not care about the discomforts of his hard journey. You and I are travelers. It will soon be over. We may have had but a very few shillings a week compared with our neighbor, but we shall be equal with him when we get there. He may have had a large house, with a great many rooms, while we had, it may be, only one upper room. Ah, we shall have as large a mansion as he in Paradise.

We shall soon be at the journey's end and then the road will not matter. Come! Let us put up with these few inconveniences on the road, for the best wine is coming. Let us pour away all the vinegar of murmuring, for the best wine shall come. Once more, if the Christian has the best wine to come, why should he envy the worldling? David did—he was discontented when he saw the prosperity of the wicked and you and I are often tempted to do it. But you know what we ought to say when we see the wicked prosper, when we see them happy and full of delights of sinful pleasure? We ought to say, “Ah, my good wine is to come, I can bear that you should have your turn—my turn will come afterwards. I can be put off with these things and lie with Lazarus at the gate, while the dogs lick my sores. My turn is to come, when the angels shall carry me into Abraham's bosom and your turn is to come too, when in Hell you lift up your eyes, being in torments.

Christian, what more shall I say to you? Though there are a thousand lessons to learn from this, that the best wine is kept to the last—“Take heed to yourself, that you also keep your good wine until the last. The further you go on the road, seek to bring to your Savior the more acceptable sacrifice. You had little faith years ago—Man, bring out the good wine now! Seek to have more faith. Your Master is better to you every day and you shall see Him to be the best of all masters and friends. Seek to be better to your Master every day. Be more generous to His cause, more active to labor for Him, more kind to His people, more diligent in prayer. And take heed that as you grow in years, you grow in Grace, so that when you come at last to the river Jordan and the Master shall give you the best wine, you may also give to Him the best wine and praise Him most loudly when the battle shall just be over and when the whirlwind is dying away into the everlasting peace of Paradise.

And now, dear Friends, I am conscious that I have totally failed in endeavoring to bring forth this good wine. But it is written that God has revealed it unto us by His Spirit, but that ear has not heard it. Now, if I had told it to you tonight and your ear would have heard it, then the text would not have been true. And as I have unwittingly proved the truth of this Scripture, I cannot be very sorry at having helped to witness the truth of my Master's word. Only this I say—the nearer you live to Christ the nearer you will be to Heaven—for if there is one place next door to Pisgah it is Calvary. It may seem strange but if you live much on Calvary you live very near Nebo. For although Moses may have seen Canaan from Nebo, I have never seen Heaven anywhere but close to Calvary.

When I have seen my Savior crucified, then I have seen Him glorified. When I have read my name written in His blood, then I have seen afterwards my mansion which He has prepared for me. When I have seen my sins washed away, then I have seen the white robe that I am to wear forever. Live near to the Savior, Brothers and Sisters, and you shall not be very far off Heaven. Remember, after all, it is not far to Heaven. It is only one gentle sigh and we are there. We talk of it as a land very far off, but close it is and who knows but that the spirits of the just are here tonight? Heaven is close to us. We cannot tell where it is, but this we know, that it is *not* a far off land. It is so near, that, swifter than thought, we shall be there, emancipated from our care and woe and blessed forever.

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