

Coming Up From the Wilderness

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the character and description of the person coming up from the wilderness, representing the redeemed, regenerated, believing saint of God, and the significance of the wilderness in the Bible.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:15, Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah 35:1, Zechariah 3:8, John 15:5, Ephesians 3:18, Ephesians 5:25, Hebrews 6:19, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 21:3

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christ's Love"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the Church of God, represented as a virgin bride of Christ, coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved, Jesus. The wilderness symbolizes the present suffering condition of the Church, marked by toil, solitude, peril, lack of food and water, and spiritual dangers. The believer is described as continually coming up from self, sin, temptation, and unbelief, leaning on Christ for strength, love, and salvation. This posture of leaning on Jesus signifies a tender affection, weakness, and a sweet union with the Savior, leading to eternal bliss in His presence.

Transcript

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on October 18, 1857, by J. C. Philpot

"Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" Solomon's Song 8:5

The Song of Solomon is altogether a spiritual book- as spiritual, because as much inspired by the Holy Spirit, as any other portion of the sacred volume. It is true that there are in it figures and images drawn from human love which the carnal mind may abuse; for what is there, however holy and sacred, which the perverse heart of man will not wantonly profane? Fire may be taken from God's altar to burn incense to an idol. A drunken profligate may feed his vile passions by looking upon the most chaste and most virtuous female. An impure mind may pervert to wrong meanings the purest language. This is their sin and shame. But their abuse of what in itself is pure, casts no taint upon, and communicates no defilement unto, the object itself.

There is nothing in conjugal love, from which many of the figures of the Song of Solomon are taken, in itself impure, for that existed before the fall. It is of God's own appointment that the feeling or passion which is commonly called love should exist between the sexes; and when hallowed by God's own institution, marriage, there is nothing impure in conjugal affection- for Christian husbands are bidden by God himself to "love their wives;" and therefore there can be nothing impure in the chaste figures drawn

from wedded love by the Holy Spirit.

Man, it is true, has debased the pure passion of love by his own vile lusts; but God's own institution remains the same. The sin is with those who abuse it. "Unto the pure all things are pure- but unto those who are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." If, then, we can read this sacred book under the unction and influence of the same Holy Spirit by whom it was inspired, and have in our bosom any measure of that divine love of which the representations of conjugal tenderness and affection are but dim and imperfect figures, we may draw water out of this sacred song, as from a well of salvation; and we may in the sweet communion and holy, affectionate communion that are here depicted as existing between Christ and the Church, find something corresponding to the experience of our own hearts.

In the words before us an inquiry is made, and from the peculiar form in which it is couched, it would appear as if the person putting the question had a dim and indistinct view of two noble personages coming up side by side out of a dreary desert. The person who puts the question sees, we may assume, a lovely woman leaning upon a man who yet far outshines her in nobility of demeanor, beauty of person, and loveliness of appearance. Seeing this lovely woman, leaning on this lovely and beautiful man, the question instantly and instinctively arises in the mind of the observer, to learn who she was; for there was something in her manner, appearance, gait, and whole demeanor that struck him with admiration.

WHO, then, is it that asks the question in the text? In this holy book there are for the most part but three speakers- the Bridegroom, the Bride, and the Daughters of Jerusalem. It cannot be the Bridegroom that here speaks, for he is spoken of as "the beloved." Nor can it be the Bride who asks the question, for she it is who is "coming up." It must, then, be the virgin Daughters of Jerusalem, who, struck with this unusual appearance in the wilderness, put to each other this question, expressive of their admiration as well as of inquiry- "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?"

In opening up these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable-

I First, endeavor to show who this is; in other words the character and description of the person coming up.

II. Secondly, the wilderness in which the person spoken of at present is; for out of the wilderness the object looked at, is represented as coming.

III. Thirdly, the coming up from the wilderness.

IV. Fourthly, the posture in which she is seen, "leaning upon her beloved."

And may the Lord enable me so to speak, that power and unction, dew and savor, may accompany the word to your heart.

I. The character and description of the person coming up from the wilderness. "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness?" No other than the virgin bride of Christ- his chosen spouse, the Church of God. But by the term, the Church of God, we may understand not only Christ's bridal spouse, viewed as consisting of the "general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23); but we may also, following the language of Scripture, apply the words to a rather narrower circle. If we view the Church as the bride and spouse of Christ in the fullest sense of the word, then we must include in the term the whole of the redeemed, all for whom Christ laid down his precious life, and all who will be eternally in

heaven worshipping and adoring a three-one God. This is the widest, broadest view of the Church of Christ.

But we may also consider the Church in a somewhat narrower light- as representing the saints of God now upon earth- what is often called the "Church militant" that is, the Church in her present suffering condition, as warring against Satan, the world, and the flesh, as distinct from the "Church triumphant" above. Not, then, to the Church in glory, but to the Church in grace, do the words apply which the Holy Spirit puts into the mouth of the inquiring daughters of Jerusalem- "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness?"

But we may take a narrower view of the words even than this. We may bring the subject down, as I mean to do, to describe the experience of every living soul; for what is the Church below but an aggregate of believers? The Church of Christ upon earth is made up of believing men and women, who are all members of the mystical body of Jesus, who all have a certain work of grace upon their souls, and by means of which they are manifested as possessing a vital union with the Lord the Lamb. This is the view, then, which I shall take of the words in answering the question- "Who is this?" that I may not wander into loose and vague generalities, or merely entertain your minds with a doctrinal discourse about Christ and his Church, but bring the subject to bear closely and experimentally upon your heart and conscience.

View, then, with me the person described as coming up out of the wilderness as an individual believer, a child of God, a saint of the Most High- not merely redeemed by atoning blood, but regenerated by effectual grace. View him also as possessing a vital union with the Lord Jesus- a union produced as well as evidenced by some manifestation of Christ to his soul. Let us be clear as well as decided upon these points, for such a one only, as I shall hope to show, can fully come up to the description given in the text, as coming up "leaning upon his beloved."

We need not, then, go very far to discover, in the light and life of the Spirit's teaching, who is this? The answer may be readily given- he is one made alive unto God by regenerating grace- one who knows something of the entrance of the word into his conscience, laying bare the secrets of his heart, and discovering the guilt, the filth, the evil, and the miserable consequences of sin. He is one who knows something of the deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and wickedness of his own fallen nature. He is one who is separated from the world, whether dead in sin or dead in a profession, by a sovereign work of grace upon his heart. He is one who has been led to see the emptiness of a mere 'notional knowledge' of the truth, without knowing experimentally, the healing power of love and blood. He is one who has been stripped of creature wisdom, human strength, and a fig-leaf righteousness, and been made to see that unless he has a vital saving interest in the blood and obedience of Jesus, he must perish in his sins. He is one whom God the Spirit has blessed with a living faith. And, by a "living faith," I mean a faith that works by love, purifies the heart, separates from the world, delivers from the power and practice of sin, overcomes the wicked one, receives grace and strength, life and power out of the fullness of Christ, and the end of which is the salvation of the soul. He is one who is blessed also with a good hope through grace- who has had some discovery of the Lord Jesus to his soul, so as to raise up in his heart a hope in his mercy, enabling him to cast forth that anchor which is both sure and steadfast, into that within the veil, where he rides secure from death and hell, and where, through upholding grace, he will outride every storm. He is one who is blessed with a vital union with the Lord Jesus; for he is said in the text to "lean upon him"- which implies that he has such a union with Jesus as enables him to rest wholly and solely upon him, and upon what he is made unto him. He is one who is also blessed and favored at times not only with union, but with a measure of sweet and sacred communion with the Lord of life and glory; for to "lean upon him" implies that he is favored with some such holy nearness as John had when he lay in his bosom. He is one, too, who is not ignorant of trial or temptation, for the wilderness finds him enough of both; nor is he one who is

ignorant of sufferings, afflictions, and sorrows; for this is the distinctive character of the present wilderness condition. He is not unacquainted with spiritual hungering and thirsting, for the wilderness in itself affords neither food nor water. Nor is he a stranger to the fiery flying serpents that haunt the wilderness, nor to the perils and dangers that encompass the traveler therein from the pestilential wind, the roving Arab, and the moving columns of sand.

But with all the vicissitudes of the wilderness, which he deeply and painfully feels, with all its dust upon his face and clothes, with all his swarthy visage and wearied gait, yet there is that in his demeanor and appearance which strikes a beholder, who has at least eyes to see what true grace is and does, with wonder and astonishment. A sinner saved is a spectacle for angels to contemplate. As the apostle says, "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men." The ancients used to say that "a good man struggling with difficulties was a sight for the gods to look at." We may say, with all Christian truth, that the mysteries of redemption are "things the angels desire to look into;" and among the mysteries of redemption, what greater than a redeemed sinner?

That a man who deserves, by sin original and sin actual, nothing but the eternal wrath of God, should be lifted out of justly merited perdition, into salvation to which he can have no claim, must indeed ever be a holy wonder. And that you or I should ever have been fixed on in the electing love of God- ever have been given to Jesus to redeem- ever quickened by the Spirit to feel our lost, ruined state- ever blessed with any discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his saving grace- this is and ever must be a matter of holy astonishment here, and will be a theme for endless praise hereafter.

To see a man altogether so different from what he once was- once so careless, carnal, ignorant, unconcerned- to see that man now upon his knees begging for mercy, the tears streaming down his face, his bosom heaving with convulsive sighs, his eyes looking upward that pardon may reach him in his desperate state,- is not that a man to be looked at with wonder and admiration?

To see another who might have pushed his way in the busy, bustling scenes of life, who might have had honors, riches, and everything the world had to bestow heaped upon his head, abandon all for Jesus' sake, and with Moses, "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"- is not that man a wonder?

To live while here on earth in union and communion with an invisible God- to talk to Jesus, whom the eye of sense has never seen, and whose voice the ear of sense has never heard; and yet to see him as sensibly by the eye of faith as though the natural eye rested upon his glorious Person, and to hear his voice speaking into the inmost heart, as plainly and clearly as though the sound of his lips met the natural ear- is not that a wonder also?

To see a man preferring one smile from the face of Jesus and one word from his peace-speaking lips to all the titles, honors, pleasures, and power that the world can bestow- why surely if there be a wonder upon earth, that man is one.

And so says the Lord himself- "Hear now, O, Joshua, the high priest, you and your fellows that sit before you, for they are men wondered at." (Zech. 3:8.) And again- "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel." (Isaiah 8:18.) May we not, then, say with admiring as well as wondering eyes- "Who is this?" "Why, this man I knew- worldly, proud, ambitious, self-seeking. That man I knew given up to vanity and pride. The other I knew buried in politics, swallowed up in pleasure and gaiety, abandoned to everything vile and sensual. But he has now become prayerful, watchful,

tender-hearted, choosing the company of God's saints, giving up everything that his carnal mind once approved of and delighted in, and manifesting in his walk, conversation, and whole deportment that he is altogether a new creature."

When we view such a man, especially if we see him for the first time after grace has changed his heart, well may we look at him a second time and say- "Who is this?" Was not this the very feeling of the disciples when Saul first "preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God?" "All that heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the one who persecuted the Church of God?" So we look and wonder, and feel at times a holy joy that he who reigns at God's right hand is ever adding trophies to his immortal crown. And whenever we see any of those near and dear to us in the flesh- be it husband, wife, sister, brother, child, relative, or friend- touched by the finger of this all-conquering Lord, subdued by his grace, and wrought upon by his Spirit, then not only do we look upon such with holy wonder, but with the tenderest affection, mingled with the tears of thankful praise to the God of all our mercies. Thus far have I answered the question- "Who is this?" and have shown him to be a redeemed, regenerated, believing saint of God.

II. But I pass on to show WHERE the suffering Church of Christ now is; because she must evidently be in the wilderness before she can come up from it. The "wilderness" is a standing emblem and figure in the word of God, and derives much of its significance from this circumstance- that in those countries there were, as there still are, vast tracts of desert sand. In our humid, favored climate, where vegetation is so luxuriant and beautiful, we can scarcely picture to ourselves what a desert is in an almost tropical zone, where no blade of grass grows, and where all is waste and wild. But the regions east and south of Palestine are full of such barren tracts. That was one reason why a desert wilderness became a standing figure in God's word. Another reason is, because the children of Israel had wandered 40 years in the wilderness, which therefore became a standing emblem of the Church of God in her present, suffering condition. They sojourned there for 40 years, sustained by manna from heaven and water from the rock, as the Church of Christ lives now upon the bread of heaven and the streams of salvation.

But I have to explain, as the Lord may enable, why the present state and condition of the Church of God is compared to a wilderness; and there are certain features in a wilderness that set it forth in a very striking and experimental manner.

1. A wilderness is not only not cultivated, but it is UNCULTIVABLE. No cultivation by man can induce it to bring forth either fruit or flower. It is a barren sand- a wild tract on which the rays of the sun eternally beat; and there being but a wide, desolate waste of sand, nothing can possibly grow there which possesses vegetable life but a few stunted thorny shrubs. Such is the natural heart of man- not only not cultivated, but not cultivable. You never can get anything spiritually good to grow in man's carnal mind. I say spiritually good, because I am not speaking of anything naturally and morally good. When the Lord, then, would have good grow in a man's heart, he gives him a new heart and a new spirit; and in that new heart and new spirit the graces of the Blessed Spirit, planted there by his own hand, thrive and grow under his fostering eye.

Whatever good there is in man, it is by the grace of God; for "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights. "From me," says the Lord, "is your fruit found." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in the vine, no more can you except you abide in me." It is true there still are some relics of the fall in natural kindness, compassion, benevolence, and a large amount of social affection; and there are many beautiful people in the various walks of life who, so far from

being religious, would scorn even the very idea of a religious profession. It is indispensable to the very fabric of society that husbands should love their wives, parents their children, and that there should be a general tone of uprightness and morality pervading public thought and opinion. But here it begins and ends. The glory of God is not sought by them, and without this there is nothing spiritually good or acceptable in his sight. Justly, therefore, is the natural heart of man compared to "a wilderness," where dreariness and desolation ever reign.

2. But there is another reason why our present life is compared to a wilderness. It is a SOLITARY PLACE, as the Lord himself calls it. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them" (Isaiah 35:1). In the wilderness, no inhabitants dwell with fixed and settled abodes. Men pass through it, but they pass through it in haste. There are no towns or villages, busy cities, or crowded haunts of men. Mere migratory bands of roving Arabs, dwelling in 'tents', sweep over it like a cloud of rolling sand. So with this life- it is merely a state of transition. We have no abiding city here; no resting place; no home; but are always in a state of change. Like the roving Arab, we live in tents, pitched for the night; and, like the traveler described, Psalm 107, "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way, and find no city to dwell in." And this is true as much of our heart itself as of our present life. As the wilderness naturally is a place where men do not and cannot have any fixed habitation; so the heart of man, in our present state, is as restless as the moving sand, and as unsteady as the wearied foot that presses it. "Arise, depart, this is not your rest," sounds as with a trumpet tongue through the wilderness.

3. But there is another reason why the wilderness aptly represents our present state. In the wilderness, there are many toils and sufferings. The very circumstance of passing through it is a toil in itself. Had you under a burning sun to toil through sand perhaps half up to your knees, and that day after day- sometimes, maddened by the scorching rays beating upon your head; sometimes enveloped in clouds of dust; sometimes almost stifled by the pestilential winds that blow across the desert; with little food and less water- what labor and suffering would be your lot! And how again and again it would seem as if you were too faint and weary, when you cast your eye over the wide waste, ever to hold out, or safely reach the place of your destination. So it is in grace. The toils and sorrows, labors and sufferings of the present life make it indeed a wilderness to all who truly fear God.

4. Again the wilderness was not only a place of severe toil and suffering, but one of great peril and danger. Moses reminds the children of Israel of "that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought" (Deut. 8:15). Jeremiah speaks of "the Arabian in the wilderness" (3:2), as we know there are to this day various tribes of Bedouin Arabs, ever on the watch to seize the traveler, strip him of all his goods, treat him with violence, and leave him to perish in the sand. Violent winds also, alike noxious and pestilential, blow across the desert, as "the wind that smote the four corners of the house where Job's eldest son dwelt" (1:19), and such as "the blast" which God sent to smite the host of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:7, 35). Thus, besides the intrinsic perils of the wilderness, as a barren tract of sand, there were dangers of another kind that assailed the unhappy traveler.

So it is in the things of God. There are fiery serpents and scorpions in our own hearts, in the sins that bite and pierce with envenomed tooth and sting. There is Satan, too, like a Bedouin Arab, with his long spear, always upon the prowl, and ever seeking to harass, if he cannot destroy. Winds also of temptation, both violent and pestilential, howl across the soul, as if they would overwhelm it with the power, and infect it with the poison of every inward and outward evil. And there are moving sands that threaten to stifle and suffocate the life of God within in the working up and rolling onward column of the corruptions of our own depraved Nature.

5. Once more- the wilderness has NO FOOD. The children of Israel were sustained by manna from heaven. The wilderness had NO WATER. The children of Israel had to drink of the rock that followed them. So of this world. In a wilderness world, there is no food; in a wilderness heart, no water. Famine and thirst are perils enough, were there no other to stamp the desert with its own peculiar character.

For these reasons- and there are doubtless others that I have not mentioned- the present state of the Church of God is compared in Scripture to a wilderness; and every child of God has to prove it, sooner or later, in his own experience. He has to learn in and for himself that solitary way, that path of trial, temptation, and exercise, which will make him feel this valley of tears is not his fixed abode; that it is not life to live here, nor is happiness to be found below the skies; that if he is to have happiness unmixed with sorrow and woe, it must be when he has dropped the body and has passed into the mansions of glory, where tears are forever wiped from off all faces.

III. Pass we on to our third point, which is the description given of the bride as "COMING UP." She is described by the Holy Spirit as sojourning in the wilderness, but she is not viewed by him as in its very heart and center; for she is represented as "coming up." Now, how does she come up? When she can leave, so to speak, the wilderness behind her in her feelings; and, so experimentally come out of it, as, in the anticipations of her soul, to be looking forward to a country altogether different from it. If you had literally to travel through a wilderness like the great Sahara of Africa, or the deserts of Arabia, your eyes would be continually looking forward that they might see on the horizon the land to which you were bending your steps- not a wilderness like the region in which you were traveling, but a land of brooks and streams, where you might find food and shelter, rest and repose. Now every desire of your heart to get over the wilderness, every stretching forth of your anxious mind to be delivered from the toils and perils that surround you, would, in fact, be mentally coming up, though many a weary mile might still intervene.

1. To come up, then, from the wilderness, is first, to come up out of OURSELVES; for we are ourselves the wilderness. It is our wilderness heart that makes the world what it is to us- our own barren frames- our own desert, solitary, and bewildered minds- our own worthlessness, inability, and lack of spiritual fruitfulness- our own trials, temptations, and exercises- our own hungering and thirsting after righteousness- in a word, it is what passes in our own bosom that makes the world to us a dreary desert.

Carnal people find the world no wilderness. It is an Eden to them; or, at least, they try hard to make it so. They seek all their pleasure from, and build all their happiness upon it; nor do they dream of any other harvest of joy and delight, but what may be repaid in this happy valley, where youth, health, and good spirits are ever imagining new scenes of gratification.

But the child of grace, exercised with a thousand difficulties, passing through many temporal and spiritual sorrows, and inwardly grieved with his own want of heavenly fruitfulness, finds the wilderness within. But he still comes up out of it, and this he does by looking upward with believing eyes to him who alone can bring him out. He comes up out of his own righteousness, and shelters himself under Christ's righteousness; out of his own strength, and trusts to Christ's strength; out of his own wisdom, and hangs upon Jesus' wisdom; and out of his own tempted, tried, bewildered, and perplexed condition to find rest and peace in the finished work of the Son of God.

And thus he comes up out of the wilderness of self, not actually, but experimentally. Every desire of his soul to be delivered from a wilderness condition is, in fact, a coming up. Every heart-sickening sight that he has of sin and of himself as a sinner; every aspiration after Jesus; every longing look, earnest sigh,

piteous cry, or laboring groan, all are a "coming up." Every act of faith upon his gracious Majesty; every casting of his soul upon him who is able to save to the uttermost; every feeling of love, every tender thought and affectionate desire, with all the struggling of his spiritual faculties, all the straining of his anxious eye, all the stretching forth of his longing arms to embrace the Lord the Lamb, and get a manifestation of his love to his soul- may all be summed up in the expression, "a coming up from the wilderness."

His turning his back upon an ungodly world; renouncing its pleasures, its honors, its pride, and its ambition; seeking union and communion with Jesus as his chief delight; and accounting all things but loss and rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord as revealed to his soul by the power of God- this, too, is coming up from the wilderness.

Giving up everything inconsistent with the Lord's grace and glory; renouncing everything which has not the stamp of God's approbation upon it; tearing himself from friends, however near and dear, if they would keep him from the Lord, if they would throw their arms around him to prevent him leaving them for Christ; struggling out of all the entwinings of sin, all the embraces of unhallowed desire, all the suggestions of pride, all the workings of self-righteousness, and all the sinkings of despair- to break away from these ties and fetters, and to stretch forth the hands of faith to embrace Jesus who alone can deliver him from his destruction- this is coming up from the wilderness.

To love the dear saints of God; to desire to walk with them in sweet affection and holy fellowship; to esteem them the excellent of the earth; to make them our choice companions, is also a coming up from the wilderness, because they too are all coming up- and we come up with them in heart and soul. It is then as if the saints of God took each other by the hand and said- "Come along, brother; come along, sister; let us come out of the world; let us leave this wilderness in which we have so long dwelt; let us journey onwards to a heavenly country. Home is in sight. Heaven is in view. Those who have gone before us have safely reached the heavenly country. They all came up from the wilderness; they all came out of the world; and they all looked to and leaned upon Jesus. Let us come up together as they did. Let us join hands, hearts, and affections, and all as one band come up from the wilderness, and walk in sweet union, as men whose hearts God has touched."

But I may further remark that it does not say- "Who is this that has come up?" nor "Who is this that will come up?" But, "Who is this that comes up?" She is ever coming up and yet never comes out; ever coming up and yet still in- coming out of self, and yet often miserably entangled with self; coming up from her own righteousness, and yet often ensnared by her own righteousness; coming up out of sin, and yet, inwardly at least, often entangled in sin; coming up out of temptation, and yet often overcome by temptation; coming up out of everything ungodly, and yet often bowed down by what is ungodly; coming up out of doubt and fear, and yet held back by doubt and fear; coming up out of unbelief, and yet continually fettered by unbelief; coming up out of sorrow, and yet again and again overwhelmed by sorrow- so she is ever coming up, ever coming up, and yet until death snaps the slender thread, never fully comes out; or if for a few moments she does come out into any sweet enjoyment of Christ's love, yet again and again she falls back to her old state; again and again she has to sojourn in the wilderness. She thus resembles the children of Israel, who in the first year of their pilgrimage came to the borders of the promised land, and yet had to retrace their steps to the Red Sea.

IV. But the fourth and last thing said of her is that she is "leaning upon her beloved." She has then a choice companion; and if I know anything of her heart, she would not have any other. It is sweet, you

know, for those who love one another to be together- two lovers are quite sufficient company for each other, and a third would only be an intruder. So it is with the Church of Christ, and her glorious covenant Head. She is in the best of all company, when she is with him; for she is leaning upon one who is dear to her, and to whom she is more than equally dear; for she can love him only with a human heart, but he can love her with a divine. He loves her with the heart of God, and we at best can only love him with the heart of man. As much, therefore, as God exceeds man, so does the love of Christ to his church exceed the love of the church to Christ.

Do you do you think can by any calculation measure the breadth, length, depth, or height of the love of Christ? Before you can do that, you must be able to measure God. And as you cannot measure him, who is infinite, you can never measure, as you never can comprehend, the love of Christ, for "it passes knowledge." But "we love him because he first loved us." We have but a drop of his love, at best, in our soul; he has the ocean of love in his own heart. We may have a ray out of the sun; but the sun himself is full of rays. A ray may burst through a cloud, or shine through a chink in a shutter; but that ray is not the sun. He has millions of rays beside that one.

So the Lord may shine upon a sinner's heart with a beam of his love or a ray of his glory; but when he has given that, he still has in himself all the fullness of God. He has millions and millions and millions of beams and rays of love with which to shine upon his saints, both in heaven and earth. Now it is a 'reflection of his love' that makes us love him; and so far as we have a measure of love to his most blessed Majesty, we lean upon him. That posture implies weakness, and yet tender affection. It is a lovely sight to see a wife leaning upon a husband's arm- it is her privilege to lean, as it is his privilege to support. But it is not a lovely sight to see a loose woman hanging on a man's arm. So in grace. It is a lovely sight to see Christ and the church in sweet union. But it would not be a lovely sight to see your son walking down the street with a prostitute. That would be no pleasing scene to meet a father's eye. To see him walking with his wife might make you admire his attentive affection; to see him arm in arm with one who is a disgrace to her sex would shock your every feeling. Thus to see the church in union with Christ, and as such leaning on him, is a lovely sight. But to see professors of religion arm in arm with the world- I leave the application of the figure to you.

To "lean upon" Christ as "her beloved" is for the church to lean upon his glorious Person as the God-man- upon his covenant engagements- upon his unchanging love- upon his atoning blood- upon his justifying obedience- in a word, upon all that he is as Jesus. Thus to lean upon him is to rest all that we have for time and eternity wholly upon the Son of God and his finished work. And this the Church of God is here represented as doing. The Holy Spirit brings her before our mind as coming up from a wilderness world "leaning upon her beloved." And who can the Church's "beloved" be but Jesus?

Is that your posture? Would the virgin daughters of Jerusalem, if they looked upon you, say, with holy, wonder- "Who is this man coming up out of the wilderness leaning upon his beloved?" Would they see you coming up in prayer, desire, and supplication? Would they behold you at any time on your knees looking up with longing eye, or in the enjoyment of manifested mercy, leaning, like John, upon his bosom? Would they view you having, or even desiring to have, any union or communion with Jesus? And would such say of you- "This person is coming up out of the wilderness, and he is leaning upon Jesus as his beloved"? Could any friend or relative say of you- "Who is this man that was once buried in the world- whom I once knew so light and trifling, so proud and vain, so given up to sin and self? O how Christ is now his all! What an alteration!" Or would the saints of God say of you- "How this man has come out of self, and how evidently he is leaning upon Jesus?" Would any one that knows you and fears God say this of you?

Now if you can find anything in your soul's experience corresponding to what the Holy Spirit has laid down in our text, you are manifestly one of Christ's dear people; you belong to the Church of God; you are coming up out of the wilderness; you are leaning upon your beloved. And leaning upon him here, you will see him face to face hereafter. You will be with him in bliss; and the day will come when you will see him without a veil between, and admire, adore, and enjoy him to all eternity!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/coming-up-from-the-wilderness/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net