

The Agonizing Absence of the Bridegroom

Hello, & welcome to the *Voice of the Church*. We're looking at the Song of Songs. Picking up in chapter 3. The book begins with an exclamation of desire, as the bride-to-be sings of her love & desire for the king, who's worthy of her praise. And then in chapter 2, he invites her to come away with him – an invitation to marriage... To which she responds, “I am my beloved's & my beloved is mine. *Hurry back*, & be like a gazelle.” It's a request for a short engagement; a request for him to hurry up & make the necessary preparations...

In 3 v.6, he'll return. But in our passage today, chapter 3, vv. 1 to 5, it's the time of their betrothal. Where she says, “On my bed by night, I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but found him not... I'll rise now & go about the city, in the streets & in the squares; I'll seek him whom my soul loves... I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me as they went about the city. ‘Have you seen him whom my soul loves?’ [And] scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I'd brought him into the chamber of her who conceived me.”

In this poetic description of the period of their separation, the bride-to-be risks her life looking for her beloved, & will not rest 'til she finds him... In fact, she *cannot* rest, because she's so *consumed* with the *thought* of her beloved...

And what's interesting about this poetic description is that it resembles psalms like Psalm 42 & especially 63, where the believer feels separation from God... Psalm 63 speaks of seeking God but not finding him, lying in bed at night yearning for him, & finally clinging to him, as in Song of Songs 3 v. 4... It's a song about his love, that employs marital-imagery like “coming under his wings” (think Ruth 2), or “clinging” to him (think *Genesis* 2). And, Solomon, the author of the Song of Songs patterns this part of the song after his father's Psalm 63: about God... So, what I'm suggesting is that, this longing in Song of Songs 3, is described for us to teach us not about marriage, but that to which marriage points: *communion with Christ*.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the bride's speech is the way she describes her beloved as “the one my *soul* loves.” V. 1, v. 2, v. 3, & v. 4... It sounds a bit like Deut. 6: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your *soul*.” It seems to be a deliberate echo of the most well-known verse in the OT, confirming that the king represents the Divine Bridegroom, Solomon's son, Jesus Christ... The one my *soul* loves is the Lord!

And the word for ‘seek’ or ‘sought’ that comes up 4x in this passage is used throughout the Bible of God’s people seeking *Him*. 1 Chronicles 16: “Seek the Lord, seek his strength, seek his face...” Isaiah 55: “Seek him while he may be found...” Jer. 29: “You will seek me & find me when you search with all your heart...” Psalm 63, Deuteronomy 4, *over & over...* It comes up in Hosea in the context of *seeking the Lord as bridegroom...* The verb the bride uses for seeking is most commonly associated with the Lord: “the one whom our soul is to love...”

The one we’re to “cling to.” Notice she “holds him & will not let him go,” v. 4. It has overtones of *loyalty & faithfulness* – not unlike the loyalty & faithfulness God’s people are to have for him as they cling in covenant & do not forsake him... The language used throughout this portion of the Song is language of the OT for the way God’s people are to seek him, & cling to him with all their heart, soul, mind, & strength.

The devotion of the bride is to be the devotion God’s people have for him (what we see in Psalm 42 or 63 – where the psalmist’s soul is downcast in the absence of his Lord, where he’s lying on his bed throughout the night, as in Psalm 77) ... This is a song about desire for the Lord; a song about those seasons where he feels absent & we long to feel him near... *Have you ever had those seasons...? (pause)* Look with me at the bride & take comfort. First in her sad condition. Then her earnest seeking. And, finally, her sweet embrace.

In v. 1, we see her sad condition, in this imagery of ‘night...’As in Psalm 63 or 77, “I meditate on you in the watches of the *night*... My hand is stretched out in the *night* without ceasing...” One writer says, “Night can be the occasion for troubling thoughts & emotional turmoil. The sleepless night is a biblical archetype. The psalmist often pictures night as a time of uncontrollable weeping, mental aberrations, & unidentified terror...” The bride’s sad case is implied in those 2 words at the beginning of v. 1: *by night*.” It speaks of “darkness & affliction” as opposed to joy & light...

And this is not a one-time occasion. But the NASB says, “On my bed, *night after night*, I sought him.” It’s in the plural. Some suggest it’s may even be a dream, & if so, a recurring dream. Where the poetic description of the bride is that of a distressed lover in the *prolonged absence* of the one her soul loves... *Can you relate to that...?*

Maybe you & your spouse had a season of long-distance prior to marriage. Maybe you've had a rough breakup where you miss that person *deeply*. Maybe you've lost a spouse to *death* & the nights feel *long*... Or see others getting married & nothing seems to be happening for you, & you lie awake at night afraid of being *alone*... In each case, you have a deep *longing*... That's *something* like what the bride feels... And it leads to *anxiety*; it leads to *distress*.

And what the Song is telling us is: is this sort of deep longing pictures the sort of longing we're to have for the Lord... In those times where he feels distant, he feels far off. Prayers feel unanswered. Here in the bride's sad condition, we have a word of comfort... As Owen once said, "'I sought him but found him not' is a thing which *not seldom befalls us* in our communion with Christ." It's normal... Here, we have here a picture of those seasons where Christ *seems* to have removed his presence. Where we go through the motions of the Christian life with little enjoyment... *Longing* for him; *seeking* him; but not *finding*...

But thankfully that's not all the bride gives us. Look with me next, at the bride's earnest seeking... She seeks him in v. 1: "I sought him but found him not." Seeks him again in v. 2: "I said, 'I'll rise & go about the city, in the streets & the squares, I'll seek the one I love..." Four times, it tells us, she seeks him... And, as I said, this verb is often used in connection with seeking the **Lord**... Deut. 4, Isa. 55; Jer. 29. And in each case, the Lord gives every assurance that when his people seek him, he **will** avail himself to them...! (*pause*) That's what we sing of in the psalms... Psalm 13 *begins*, "How long will you forget me Lord, forever will it be?" but *ends*, "The Lord has dealt bountifully with me..." Psalm 42 *begins* with a panting & thirst, but ends with hope in God... Same with Psalm 63 of Psalm 77. The Lord gives every assurance to his people that if they seek him, they will find.

And when she does find him, look with me at her *sweet embrace*. "Scarcely had I passed the watchmen, when I found the one my soul loves. [And] I held him, & would not let him go, 'til I'd brought him to the house of my mother, into the chamber of her who conceived me."

Notice 2 things about this embrace: its **intensity** & its *aim*... She clings to him like a woman whose fiancée has just come back from war. And she will not let him go UNTIL: she'd brought him to the house of her mother, into the chamber of her who conceived her." This is Genesis 24 language of the marriage-bed. She's longing for the consummation of their marriage. For union & communion. Even as we're to long for such with *Christ!* That's the point of the book.

That even though there will be those times of spiritual lethargy, where he feels distant as he does in Psalm 63, we seek him, & he will avail himself to us. We seek him by the means he's appointed: Word & sacrament, fellowship with his people, & prayer. And when we find him, we cling to him & do not let him go... If you're listening today & you feel a sense of emptiness, a sense of longing, come to Jesus: the bridegroom whose sweet embrace is the thing your soul longs for. Come to him by faith & repentance, & enjoy the sweet union & communion that the bride speaks of in v. 4... Thank you for listening, & may the Lord bless you.