

The Radiant Bride

Hello, & welcome to *Voice of the Church*. We've been looking at the Song of Songs. Last week, we saw the bride's rejection of the king, & then reflection on his glory. The next part of the Song in Ch. 6 describes the way he continues to see her even in her sin. I'll read beginning at v. 4: "You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners! Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me... Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that've come up from the washing; all of them bear twins, not one of them has lost its young... Your cheeks are like halves of pomegranates, behind your veil... There are 60 queens & 80 concubines, virgins without number. [But] my dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her... The daughters saw her & called her blessed. The queens & concubines also, & they praised her. 'Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners...?'"

A few months back, I preached this passage for Thanksgiving, in the church that I pastor, as the Song of Songs is a book not only about marriage, but about the eternal marriage of Christ & his bride... And in the context of the Song, Christ, the Davidic King, is here singing over his bride in the midst of her sin from the previous chapter... We see in Song of Songs 6 what Christ thinks of his bride: he sees her as radiant... And in a time where the church is divided in many places (divided over COVID, divided over race-matters, divided over politics) & does not always look beautiful, it's good for us to hear the words of the king.

I want to point out 3 things in this passage: first, the *supremacy* of the bride's beauty; second, the *source* of the bride's beauty; & last, the *significance* of her beauty... First, the supremacy. She is *uniquely* beautiful. She's compared to the most beautiful cities. "As *beautiful as Tirzah...*" which means *beautiful* or *pleasant* (it would later be, for a time, the capitol of the northern kingdom) & was a city *worthy* of its name. It was a place of *beauty*... And Jerusalem *likewise* suggests *beauty*. The place where God made his name dwell. The place where his kingdom on earth was centered. Whose name meant "*habitation of peace...*" He's naming the most beautiful, peaceful, & serene, most highly significant places he can think of, & saying, "*That's* how beautiful you are." He's describing her in terms of the kingdom & promised land (both north & south), & saying, "You're as beautiful as the land of promise."

Which he goes on to describe in vv. 5-7, as he uses the fertile-land metaphors: “your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead” – meaning her body is like a fertile land sustaining life. That’s why her teeth are described not only as a flock of sheep, but a flock of sheep where none of them are barren & each bears twins... She’s a land of *blessing & fertility*.

She’s like a **pomegranate**, suggesting fruitfulness – suggesting beauty & delight... That was also mentioned in Ch. 4, where it said her temples were “like a piece of pomegranate behind her veil.” That’s a reference to the wedding day; the same veil she wore in Ch. 4... He’s saying, “You’re as lovely & delightful as you were on our wedding-day when I said that you’re like the Land of Promise.” That’s the significance of the veil; that’s the meaning of all this repeated-imagery from Ch. 4.

Just as he delighted in her on their wedding-night, he continues to do so, & ascribes to her the most meaningful imagery he can think of: the most beautiful, important cities in both the North & South; a land teeming with fruitfulness; like the blessing of God manifest in fields that support life... This is Promised-Land imagery... The Land that’s set apart as uniquely under the blessing of God.

And this theme of supreme or singular beauty is emphasized in vv. 8 & 9, where he tells her she’s “one of a kind;” he’d choose her above any other. “60 queens & 80 concubines, virgins without number. But YOU are my perfect one, the only one... Who the daughters of the kingdom call blessed, & queens & concubines praise!” Her beauty is supreme, & he’s overwhelmed (v. 5).

This is how the Son of David speaks of his bride. The same bride who, in Ch. 5, *refused* him... The same bride who is so sinful, & leaves him out in the cold: leaving him out of her worship, leaving him out of her witness, as we so often have in the last year... We’re often very unlovable. And yet here the Son of David showers his bride with words of *affection*. She’s treated him with coldness, he who’s chief among 10,000, who all the women “rejoice in” in Ch. 1! He’s the KING, & she, the sun-tanned country-girl of 1, v. 6, unworthy of his affection; but he’s condescended to her in love... And yet she refuses him... Yet *somehow*, he still calls her beautiful... And gives the same fundamental assessment of the bride he did in Ch. 4... The same assessment of her in her best moments remains unchanged in her worst... That’s we have when we compare Ch. 6 with Ch. 4. The fact that verses 5, 6, & 7 are essentially word-for-word repeated from Ch. 4 is *significant* because it means, despite her sin, *his fundamental assessment of her beauty remains unchanged*.

When he emphasizes the veil of their wedding-day, it's like he's saying, "You're as beautiful as the day we said 'I do.' My love for you hasn't changed in the least..." He doesn't reject her like she did. But welcomes her back with words of affection... This teaches us about Christ's gracious heart; it teaches us about his objective declaration of our justification that is unchanged despite our sin... And teaches us that all that's beautiful & praiseworthy within us is not native to ourselves... The bride's beauty is not a natural or native beauty. The fact that the Son of David speaks of his bride in this way is not because of anything inside her! But as we see throughout this passage, it's because of her relation to him...

In v. 4, when it says she's as lovely as Jerusalem; *what is Jerusalem*, but the place where God dwells? The place where he makes his dwelling among his people in the TEMPLE, where their sins are atoned for... The *reason* she's "as beautiful as Zion" is because the God of Zion dwells in her temple, taking away her sin, uniting her to himself... Her beauty is only by virtue of his grace. This passage has *Grace Alone* written all over it. Where he showers her with his love, & despite her unloveliness, HIS beauty which belongs natively to him alone, becomes hers...

That's what we see in v. 10. It says, "Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun...?" The moon is the reflected brightness of the sun...? As she's united to the Sun of Righteousness, *his glory emanates from her*; **HIS** radiance *is* the source of *hers*! She's not naturally bright (she's "dark" from sin; 1, v. 6), but united to the King, radiates his beauty... Like Moses whose face reflected God's glory, the church reflect the bridegroom's beauty...

The same beauty that's described in 5:10-16 is now reflected in her. THAT is the church's glory: *reflected beauty*... "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, & being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." *That's* the church's glory... Despite our sin, we're beautiful in the Beloved...

Rev. 12 describes this when it speaks of the church as a woman "clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet..." John describes the church with the language of Song of Songs 6:10, again confirming a Christ-and-the-church reading of this book. Like the cosmic bride of the Song, the woman in Rev. 12 shines with the reflected *brightness* of divine glory... She is not the sun; but is radiant with the sun's brightness... The source of her beauty is the Sun of Righteousness, into which she'll one day be fully conformed when, as Matt. 13 says, she'll "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father...!" The source of her beauty is the King...

We see that also in v. 13, where her very identity is wrapped up *in* the King... She's called the "Shulamite," the feminine form of Solomon's own name. He's chosen to refer to her in this way because derives her identity from the king to whom she is united: "I **am my beloved's!**" I belong to him, & my identity is found in belonging to him... Even as we're called "Christians," we find our identity in belonging to CHRIST, whose celestial beauty & glory radiates from us...

The source of our beauty is our union with the bridegroom. And the significance of this, then, is that the bride of Christ, despite her sin, is *worthy of praise*. That's why the "daughters" (the daughters of Zion, professors in Christ) call her "blessed." Because, despite her sin, she is lovely in Christ. Which means there's nothing commendable about abhorring the church. But those who love the lamb must love the bride. She is 'fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners' in her reflected beauty, for which we give thanks. That Christ has deigned to dwell with his people, to love us despite our flaws, & make to make us, little by little, beautiful in him... Thank you for listening, & may the Lord bless you, & give you a love for his church...