

Song of Solomon 5:2–8 — He Is Constant, She Is Changeable

The Bridegroom's Desire for Communion, the Fourfold Description, and the Work of Recovery

Scripture Reading: Song of Solomon 5:2–8

"I slept, but my heart was awake. It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.

I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?

My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."

The Book's Subject and Its Application

The Song of Solomon is not about the church. J.N. Darby's observation stands: the bride of this book is Jerusalem, the remnant of Judah in particular. The little sister at the end of the book who has no breasts is Ephraim — the northern tribes who did not undergo the same development of affection throughout the book.

This means that the prophetic fulfilment belongs to Israel's future, not to the church. Yet the question must be asked: does that mean we cannot profit from it? The answer is no. We do not need to be in the place of those we read about in order to glean profit from their experiences. The book is about the development of affections in the soul — and we need that too. We need our affections toward Christ quickened and stirred up.

This section, from verse 2 of chapter 5 through chapter 6:3, gives us the constancy of the bridegroom and his beauties, and where he may be found for communion. Its theme is stated simply: he is the constant one, but she is changeable. That is like us. The Lord Jesus is the constant one; we are the changeable ones.

I Slept, But My Heart Was Awake

The section opens with a lovely but: “I slept, but my heart was awake.” She looks as if she might be dead. But she is not — there is life in her. Her heart was awake because she is quickened. The Jewish remnant in the future will necessarily be quickened, and even now in our experience, though the soul may be in a state of spiritual drowsiness or coldness, the divine life that has been communicated is not extinguished. That but guards the reality of what God has done.

And then something wakes her. The voice of my beloved. Not merely his words, but the voice of his words — the living voice of God to the soul, with all its divine inflections and affections. There is something in God's communication that is not merely the transmission of information. It is a living thing, and there is affection in it. She hears it and recognizes it: the voice of my beloved. He knocks.

Open to Me: The Fourfold Description

His request is simple: “Open to me.” And then he says four things about her — not as repetition but as four distinct and precious things. My sister: there is a relationship established, because he has communicated divine life to her and brought her into relationship with himself. My love: he has chosen her, and therefore she is the loved object of his heart. My dove: this means my constant one, like two doves together — which is remarkable, since it will shortly emerge that she is not so constant. He calls her constant even when she fails to be so. My undefiled: Balaam, standing on the mountaintop to curse Israel at Baal-peor — when the whole plain was filled with the evidence of Israel’s sin — was nonetheless compelled to say: “I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob.” God looks at his people as they are in Christ. What he sees, from his vantage point, is the one he has made undefiled by grace.

Then comes the reason for his request: “For my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.” He had traveled to have her as his own. He had gone through something — something distressing, something costly. The dew and the drops of the night speak of his having borne what it cost to bring her to himself. The wise men brought myrrh to the Lord Jesus — myrrh speaks of his crushing, what he took at Calvary. He has suffered to make her his, and he comes asking for her response.

I Have Put Off My Coat: The Abomination of Excuses

She answers with four excuses. Significantly, he gave four beautiful descriptions of her; she offers four reasons why she cannot open. “I have put off my coat — how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet — how shall I defile them?” The Spirit of God has chosen words here to show us the character of excuses when they come in response to the Lord’s desire for communion. They are absurd. They are abominable. I put off my coat — so what? You do not know how to put a coat on? You cannot walk in the room because you might get your feet dirty?

Excuses to respond to the Lord's love are of this character. He has come having borne the cost of bringing her to himself. He has described her as his sister, his love, his dove, his undefiled. And the response is: I have put off my coat. The more elaborate and lengthy the excuse, the more clearly it shows itself to be exactly that — an excuse, not a reason.

The Myrrh on the Handles of the Lock

Then he puts his hand in through the hole of the door and her heart is moved. She rises to open to him. And as she puts her hand on the lock, she finds myrrh — liquid myrrh on the handles. She gets it on her hands. It was the tokens of his suffering, left there by him in the act of reaching for her through his withdrawn hand. She got up to respond when she was moved by his reaching. And what did she find on the lock? The marks of what it cost him.

He Had Withdrawn Himself

She opened the door — but he was gone. “My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.” The Lord Jesus is not a toy. His desire for communion with us is not something we can play with — picking it up and putting it down at our convenience. He had come; he had waited; she had lingered over her excuses; and he withdrew. Now she is stirred. Her soul fails. She seeks and calls and does not find him.

There is a further work to be done yet. The watchmen who go about the city find her, smite her, wound her, and take her veil. The watchmen represent the maintenance of God's order and holiness. She is his love, his dove, his undefiled — and yet here she is, wandering outside, failing to answer to what he has made her. The veil speaks of the submissive, retired, modest place that befits a godly woman. The governmental agencies of God, which care about his order, strip it

away. Was this because she was not truly his? No — verse 8 shows that these dealings brought her into a fresh and living sense of that fourfold description, and from there she is able to speak of his beauties and graces in verses 9 through 16.

In our own lives, if we have gone on with the Lord a while, we will have made experiences similar to this. We know he is the constant one. We find out that we are not. We may need the rod, the watchmen, the governmental dealings of God, to bring us back. But his description of us in Christ does not change one iota. “I have not beheld iniquity in Jacob.” He looks at us as in Christ. And he desires communion with us still.

He is constant. He changes not. He desires communion. And the tokens of his suffering are on the handles of the lock.