

**Song of Solomon 6: 1-3; “With Christ in His Garden”, Sermon # 51 in the series – “I am My Beloved’s, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The words of this text were written for your benefit, dear Christian, so that you will be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. The Shulamite Bride of this spiritual story, having born witness to the excellency and the glory of her Shepherd-Husband King, the daughters of Jerusalem want to know, where has He gone; where has He turned aside, so that they might seek Him also. They had heard so much of her Beloved, that now they want to know Him for themselves. As Matthew Henry has well said: “This would be but an indecent, unacceptable, compliment, if the song were not to be understood spiritually; for love is jealous of a rival, would monopolize the beloved, and cares not that others should join in seeking Him; but those that truly love Christ are desirous that others should love Him too, and be joined to Him.”

The best witness that can ever be given to those who are curious about your Lord Jesus Christ is when you will extol the spiritual beauties and glories of your relationship with Him. Even though at the time, you are going through manifold trials and afflictions, and do not sense His presence, still you seek for Him. And when this is the case, when others perceive that you will continue to seek Him even though you do not immediately find him, they may begin to realize that He truly is worth the finding for themselves also. When others begin to perceive that you have changed from being a total worldly to being a person who wants to pursue righteousness and holiness more than anything else, they will really begin to take notice of you, and they will then begin to ask questions.

That was what was happening here. The Daughters of Jerusalem asked her these questions in verse 1, because they had come to have a great respect and love for the Shulamite Bride. They call her, “the fairest among women”. They remembered that she had said of herself in Chapter 1, verse 5 – “I am dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.” They remembered that she had told them in verse 6 that “her mother’s sons were angry with her”. “They had made her the keeper of the vineyards, but her own vineyard she had not kept”.

Now they have come to know and understand, from her own lips, that she did not become the most beautiful of women, the Bride of the great King, based upon her own inherent strength and righteousness of character; it was only by the grace of the Bridegroom who loved her. And so they ask her these questions. And she is able to answer them as to where He has gone and what He is doing, even though she cannot see Him, or sense His presence with her, at that time. So listen to me now, as I attempt to explain to you, both the spiritual meaning of these questions, and the answers which the Bride gives to her friends, both believing and unbelieving.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Where does Christ go when the Christian cannot seem to find Him in their experience.**

“Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women?” “Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?” “My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices...” This Shulamite Bride, who represents the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the fairest among women because she is in spiritual union with the Fairest among Ten Thousand, the Holy One of Israel, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; the One who is radiant in His beauty and transcendent in His glory. She is married to this greatest of Personages, and so it is because of her union with Him, who is full of grace and truth, that His power and presence are transforming her life. Even though she is at times weak, and even though there are times when she feels alone, still she senses, that her Beloved is ministering to her. This is what she was attempting to tell the Daughters of Jerusalem.

She had already been telling them in Chapter 5, verses 10-16, of Christ's great power to save His Church. She had been telling them that He is the One who had been working in her heart to transform her by His grace, and that this grace was something that He purchased for her at great cost to Himself when He went to the cross. But now that He had brought her into this glorious union with Himself, she had to tell them more of the details of where He was, now, at that very moment; the moment when she could not seem to find Him in her experience. She has been love-sick because she could not find Him; but she will still tell them about that intimacy of communion and that sense of His presence which she at other times had felt and known.

She tells them what she knows; that He had gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, in order to feed His flock in the garden. She is trying to explain to them His mission and ministry to His Church, as being the One who was her Savior and her Lord, and the Savior and Lord of all who believe in Him. But in order to rightly convey this, she must attempt to explain to them the meaning of the cross, in His life and hers. She knows that she must begin before the cross so that they will understand better. So she says, "My beloved has gone to his garden". Those of you who would know the Lord Jesus as your Savior and your Lord, should understand that before Jesus went to the cross, He went into a garden; the garden of Gethsemane.

Turn with me over to Matthew 25, verse 36. "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there.'" "And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed." "Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.'" "Stay here and watch with Me." "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'" "Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What?'" "Could you not watch with Me one hour?" "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

You see, this is where Christ's disciples failed their Lord and Master. They slept when they should have been praying. But we should remember that He loved them still; loved them to the end. He cultivated and planted the garden of His own heart with love towards failing saints and unworthy sinners, even when they were too sleepy to help Him. This is also the picture that was given to us earlier in this Chapter, Chapter 5, verses 1-6, when Christ came knocking at the Shulamite's door, seeking entrance to have spiritual fellowship and communion with her. But she was too lazy, too sleepy, to get up and even open the door for Him. This was why she was in the predicament of not knowing where He went, after He left her when she refused to open to him within a reasonable time.

She had to get up and roam around the streets, searching for Him and asking where He might be found. This was why she was love-sick. This was why the Daughters of Jerusalem joined her in her search for Him. No, Jesus had to go away for a little while, to suffer, bleed, and die for His Church so that she could be saved and brought to a better, love-oriented relationship with Him. This was why He went into the Garden of Gethsemane. He went to take upon Himself the sins of His Beloved. He was raised from the dead, so that the Father would give Him all power in heaven and earth. And in giving Him that power, He would use it wisely in relation to the salvation and sanctification of His people.

Where has He gone, now that He is raised from the dead? He has gone up to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But spiritually, He is has "gone to His garden, to the beds of spices". The beds of spices are the fullness of grace out of which the Lord Jesus ministers to His beloved; His Church. He would sanctify and cleanse His Bride. Turn with me over to Ephesians 5, verse 25. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such

things, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife love himself.” “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Notice the reasons that Christ would give Himself for His Bride. It was because He loves her, first and foremostly of all; that He greatly desires that she be perfect, even as He is perfect, and that she would be holy, even as He is holy. And so He loved His wife as His own body by suffering for her sins. He was crucified for her sinful weaknesses so that she might become spiritually strong. He sanctifies her and cleanses her with the washing of water with the word. He nourishes her and cherishes her in regard to strengthening her faith so that she can truly be His helper in everything that she is doing.

The unbeliever and the worldly-minded professed Christian must come to see that they cannot love the world and Jesus too. Christ died so that believers could be crucified to the world, their earthly spiritual father and mother, and cleave to their husband Christ. This is the mystery of Christ and His church. This is the beauty of the spiritual Bride and her Bridegroom. She must live and grow strong in faith and every grace by realizing that He has beds of spices stored up for her; grace upon grace awaiting her. She must learn to feed on His faithfulness, and not think that she is sufficient in herself to see anything as coming from herself. (2 Corinthians 3: 5) Some people do not want to give up their sin and unbelief. But Christ has suffered for all of God’s elect people, so that they might grow up to be spiritually strong.

Turn with me over to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13, verse 1. “This will be the third time I am coming to you.” “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” “I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again, I will not spare—since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.” “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God.” “For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you?”—“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.”

“Test yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.” (Or fail the test) Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified.” “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” “And we are glad when we are weak and you are strong.” “And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.” The purpose of Christ bringing you to repentance, over the issue of your love of the world, is not to take every good worldly thing away from you, but it is so that you might see how infinitely better, the spiritual truths and realities are, into which He is bringing you.

There is enough remaining corruption in your soul, dear Christian, to blind you to this reality for many years if you permit it to be so. It is your love of the world and living for its selfish pleasures alone, that may cause Christ to withdraw, and for a time it may appear that He will not return and give you that manifest sense of His presence and blessing in your life. But you know where He has gone, don’t you? He has gone down to His garden, to the beds of spices. He will not leave you nor forsake you. He has suffered for your sins at the cross, and now, because He has suffered, He is actually pondering what He can give you from His Word which will draw you closer to Him.

He will cultivate His grace in the garden of your heart. He is selecting the particular gifts of His grace to give to you, and causing all things to work together for your good, so that you will change and become more like Him, and walk more closely with Him, and so become a more

useful helper to Him, to help others on to know Him better. He will, in love for you, providentially order the situations in your life to accomplish His goal. This leads us, now, to the second implied question asked by the Daughters of Jerusalem –

**2<sup>nd</sup> – What is the Heavenly Bridegroom doing while He is away from her, His beloved?**

We have looked at where the Heavenly Bridegroom is while He is away from His bride; He is in heaven. But while He is in heaven, He is always thinking upon His dear people on earth, and what He can cultivate in their hearts by His grace. Even when they are at their lowest and their weakest in spiritual strength, He is still thinking about them, and how He can strengthen and help them. But Christ is also faithful to think about His ministry to His dear Church when they meet together. And they, in turn, must think upon their mission together, and not simply to live to themselves.

Let's hear these verses again. "Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women?" "Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?" "My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies." "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." "He feeds his flock among the lilies." What is Christ doing while He is away from His Church, in heaven? He is "feeding His flock in the garden", and He is "gathering lilies". The garden which Christ cultivates is the heart of every believer, as we have seen. But let us take notice of the fact that He also cultivates His Universal Church, and all of the individual local churches which comprise it. He has gone to His garden (singular) above in heaven, but from that vantage point He is feeding His flock in the gardens. (plural)

Our Christ is not limited by the distance between heaven and earth. He feeds His flock who are on the earth with the good food of His Word; Sunday by Sunday in the worship services of the church gathered. This good work of His is accomplished by the pastor of the church preaching to the church which faithfully gathers to hear God's Word, and receive it as that which will perform a work in them. If you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are one of His lilies. Christ's will for you is to gather with His saints, and in doing so you will gather with Christ, all the good things that He intends for you in relation to joining and becoming a member of a local church. It is here called a garden.

When the church gathers together, Christ is in their midst. He feeds His flock among the lilies, in the garden of the local church. How precious and valuable a work it is; how glorifying to Him. Some Christians come to church and they only see the pastor and the people; they fail to look by faith to see Christ in the midst of His garden. It is not only Christ's purpose to feed His flock, it is also His purpose to gather lilies. Christ gathers lilies by the Father's imputing His righteousness to believers in their conversion. And He gathers them by His Spirit's working in their hearts to regularly come and meet with other Christians, and then join with the church as they become convinced that the church is Christ's body, and it is His glory.

All of this meeting with the church and joining the church and learning to love other believers by committing yourself to them, flows out of your love relationship with Jesus Christ your Lord. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Sometimes Christians don't think about these things in any other than personal terms, when all the while the greatest workings of Christ begin in the heart of a Christian, and they find their fruition in being a part of the flock and the garden of Christ. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3: 5 and following say this: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?" "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase." "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor." "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field."

In other places of the scripture, we could say that the field is “the world”, but in this one we must say that the field is the local church at Corinth; planted by Paul, watered by Apollos, but God gave the growth. And how does the local church grow and become glorifying to God? It is when people who make up that church build upon the foundation of Christ. It is when they begin to see His work behind the scenes, and they respond to His cultivating efforts in their hearts, and they learn to become His servants in righteousness, bringing forth good works, and showing their love for the brethren. Christ would gather more lilies to Himself. He says in John 4: 36 – “He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” May it be so for us.