

**The Scorching Heat upon the Bride**  
Song of Solomon 1:5-6; Matthew 16:24  
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Did Jesus, the prophets, or the apostles promise an easy and comfortable life to those who come to Him in faith? Hardly! Both in their words and in their own lives they demonstrated that living for Jesus Christ will not be popular, and will not be free of crosses, pain, suffering, sorrow, or persecution. Jesus said that whoever comes in faith to Him will have crosses to bear as they walk in His footsteps (Matthew 16:24). Peter said that Christians were not to consider it strange when they go through fiery trials of faith (1 Peter 4:12). And we not only read of those who through faith in the Lord subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, turned to flight the armies of enemies, and whose loved ones were raised from the dead, but we also read of others who trusted the Lord, but suffered greatly (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Were these who passed through such great suffering less faithful than those who experienced such mighty deliverances? Absolutely not! It is in fact in the midst of such tribulation that the Lord humbles us (for we are yet proud), shows us our continual need of Christ, gives us comfort so that we can pass along to others the sympathy and comfort we have received from Him, builds patience and endurance in us, and takes our eyes off of the fading glory of this world in hope of heaven to come.

Let us see how the bride of Jesus in all ages knows the heat of affliction, crosses, and persecution for Jesus Christ; and though these make her ugly, unattractive, and scorned in the sight of the world, it is this very suffering for Jesus Christ that make her beautiful in His sight.

Let us answer the following two questions from our text today: (1) What Is the Blackness and Comeliness of the Bride (Song 1:5)? (2) Who Is Responsible for the Blackness of the Bride (Song 1:6)?

**I. What Is the Blackness and Comeliness of the Bride (Song 1:5)?**

A. The earnest desire of the bride of Christ has been realized, for she was brought near unto her beloved Savior into the secret chambers of his love and communion (Song 1:4). But now she seems to speak in somewhat of a defensive posture in Song 1:5 (“I am black, but comely”). It is as if she has heard a question: “Who are you that such love and honor be so graciously bestowed on you by the King (Jesus Christ)?” To this the bride responds, “I confess that in the eyes of the world, I do not have the beauty which men admire, for I am black and scorched from the sun, and yet my beloved King sees me as beautiful.”

1. How is the bride black?

a. Her blackness is not due to the pigment of her skin. It is, therefore, not a natural blackness of which she speaks, but is a blackness (a darkness, a scorching of the skin) that has come from the sun beating down upon her during the heat of the day (Song 1:6). She does not have the soft, moist skin of a princess that has been pampered with all the beauty treatments that royalty in the world has to offer. Her skin is parched, scorched, and blackened (Job 30:30). She is likened to the black tents of Kedar (the son of Ishmael who persecuted Isaac).

b. The bride here gives an honest evaluation of how she is viewed by most. She knows she is not attractive or beautiful in the eyes of the world. Likewise, the true church is ugly in the eyes of the world because she does not have magnificent buildings, because those in high places do not speak well of her, because she does not have a huge budget, and because her doctrine, worship, and government is not favored by the world. However, all of that mere outward beauty in the eyes of the world doesn’t matter to the true bride of Christ. What matters to her alone is that her King sees her as comely and beautiful in His sight. This is always a good indication of the condition of your heart. Whose favor and approval is most important to

you: your family, friends, boss, co-workers, or your King's (1 Corinthians 4:13)? Do what others think of Christ or His truth cause you to be ashamed and embarrassed before them? The bride here is not ashamed of her blackness, but simply gives an honest confession as to how most view her (she's scorched from the sun). Jesus said that if you are ashamed of Him and His words, he will be ashamed of you (Luke 9:26). How would you know? If you have to be two different people depending upon who you are around (whether the ungodly or the godly), then you are likely ashamed of Jesus and His truth.

c. Commentators often focus at this point on the blackness of corruption that yet remains in the bride even since her regeneration. Now though this is surely true of every Christian (Romans 7) and is true of the bride of Christ collectively, the inward corruption, sin, and moral failures of the bride do not seem to be in this instance the reason for the bride's blackness. The cause of the blackness is not natural (i.e. her blackness is not from the natural pigment of her skin) which would seem to be the case if her blackness represented her natural corruption in Adam. Her blackness is rather from the scorching sun according to Song 1:6. The cause of her blackness is the persecution she has received from those who hate her (that is why she is black in the eyes of the world), and yet the cause of her beauty is the work of God's grace in her. Jesus loves and cherishes His grace in her though persecuted.

2. How is the bride comely?

a. The Hebrew word used here for "comely" means beautiful. This is not boasting on the part of the bride, but is only reflecting the true evaluation of the Lord Jesus for His beloved bride (Song 2:14). Her beauty is likened to the curtains in the temple. The world and those who despise the bride have their view—she's ugly and darkened by the sun. The Lord Jesus who loves her with an everlasting love has His view—she is beautiful. Let the world call you what it will (whatever the hateful name or description), you are most beautiful in His sight and loved by the Lord Jesus with a sacrificial love (1 John 3:1). Stop evaluating yourself based upon what others think, and look to Jesus.

b. The beauty of the bride has nothing to do with some natural, inherent beauty of goodness, loveliness, or righteousness. She had nothing to commend herself to Jesus Christ at all. She was by nature as ugly and vile in her corruption and sin as the next person. Her beauty is entirely due to the love and grace of Jesus Christ bestowed upon her. Her election from eternity is of love and grace. Her redemption, her effectual calling, her justification, her sanctification, and her glorification is all (from beginning to end) of love and grace in Jesus Christ. In this particular context, where the bride is black and dark from the scorching heat of persecution she has faced, Jesus especially finds her beautiful. For all of the suffering, crosses, afflictions, sorrows, hatred, and persecution she has endured from others has not made her ugly, but through the grace of Jesus Christ has worked in her to make her so beautiful in His sight.

c. An indication that you are united to Jesus by faith alone is that what you suffer for Christ does not embitter you, does not make you calloused and hardened to Jesus and His truth, does not send you running from Him, does not drive you to indifference, but rather humbles your pride, breaks your rebellion, increases your trust in Him, leads you to thankfulness, strengthens you in perseverance to be faithful, and abounds in renewed love for your beloved Savior who will never leave you nor forsake you (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

B. To whom does the bride address these words? She speaks to "the daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 1:5). Who are these daughters?

1. We have previously noted a group of faithful Christians called "virgins" (Song 1:3) and "the upright" (Song 1:4). The bride is the elect Church viewed as a body, whereas the virgins are members of that Church viewed individually. The daughters of Jerusalem are a group of professing Christians within the Church that are loved by the King (Song 3:10), but they manifest certain weaknesses and infirmities. They have not grown to understand fully the love they should have for Jesus—they are immature (Song 5:9,16).

2. The daughters of Jerusalem are not enemies to Christ or the bride, but they have need

of time spent with Jesus Christ—they need to have the earnest and loving affection to be near Him and to enjoy Him. Perhaps their love has grown cold. Perhaps they have allowed the world and its attractions, or the desires of the flesh to occupy so much of their time that they have become lukewarm in their affections. Dear ones, let not your union with Christ be all that satisfies your Christian life, but realize that there is so much more to the Christian life in growing in your love to know Jesus Christ and obey Him, and to know as much as you can about him (His doctrine, worship, and faithfulness to His commandments). The one you love with all your heart is one you desire to know inside and out. Likewise, you will not be satisfied with a superficial knowledge of Jesus, but will desire to abound in love and knowledge of Him. Courtships, engagements, and marriages often start off that way, but so often it becomes a thing of the past. It is likewise true in the Christian life. In both cases, confess it, repent of it, and renew it.

## **II. Who Is Responsible for the Blackness of the Bride (Song 1:6)?**

A. The bride explains to the daughters of Jerusalem why she is black. She says to them in effect, “Look not upon me with scorn because I am black according to those who hate me, for the scorching sun of persecution, sorrow, affliction, tears, crosses, and suffering for Jesus Christ and His truth have made me ugly in the sight of many.” The bride does not want her suffering for Christ to hinder by fear, indignation, or astonishment the growth in Christ of these daughters of Jerusalem. The metaphor of a scorching sun is used in Scripture to signify persecution for Christ and His truth (the seed that fell on the stony ground but was scorched by the sun, Matthew 13:6,21).

1. The scorching heat of persecution is not limited to those in biblical times, or to the Waldenses who were slaughtered by Roman Catholic persecution, or to the French Huguenot who were massacred on St. Bartholomew’s Day, or to the Scottish Covenanters who were hunted down like animals, or to those throughout the world today that are facing torture, imprisonment, and death for Jesus Christ and His truth. The scorching heat of persecution may come in the form of losing a job or work due to your upholding the Fourth Commandment, or being mocked and ridiculed for believing Scripture is the inspired Word of God, or being called a “separatist” for an unwillingness to compromise faithful Terms of Communion, or being called a bigot because you will not call what is evil good or call what is good evil, or losing the closeness of family members because you cannot join with them in their celebration of holy days that are not found in Scripture, or being called a traitor because you cannot uphold the Constitution or many of the laws of this country as biblical.

2. Christians endure the scorching heat of persecution when their husband or wife pursues a divorce for grounds not found in Scripture (adultery or desertion)? Christians endure persecution in their homes because they will not do what is contrary to God’s commandments even if it would bring a compromised peace? Christian students face persecution from teachers and fellow students because they will not deny God as Creator of heaven and earth? How many are under the scorching heat of persecution, crosses, sorrow, and tears in the very illnesses and they endure (as did Job)? Dear ones, all true Christians suffer persecution and opposition for Christ and His truth (Acts 14:22). If that is not true of you at all, you should be asking yourself, “Why not?”

B. The bride’s blackness is generally due to the scorching heat of persecution from various sources, but in particular she notes here that it is from “my mother’s children” who were angry with me (Song 1:6).

1. Here is another group of people brought forward. This group has some connection with the bride’s mother (they have an external relationship to the Visible Church broadly speaking), but they have laid heavy burdens not commanded in Scripture for the bride to keep (by way of unsound doctrine, corrupt worship, unfaithful church government, and duties not found in God’s Moral Law). This is a kind of persecution that scorches the consciences of the faithful bride (Psalm 69:8-9). Your blackness in all of the crosses you bear

are putting to death the old man and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. Your blackness is a badge of honor in the sight of Christ. Your pain, your brokenness, your tears that are crosses you have born for the Lord Jesus Christ may be ugly to the world, but they make you so beautiful in the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

2. Here is another reason why I do not believe this is actual history, but is an allegory. It is not likely at all that the actual bride of Solomon, the queen, would be forced to work under the hot sun in others' vineyards and would be so mistreated by her siblings. As an allegory, it presents no problem at all, but as actual history, we ask, "How could the bride of Solomon, the queen, be so abused?"

3. What does the bride say has sadly happened as a result of this cross she has born from her mother's children in being forced to work under the scorching sun in the vineyard of others? She has not faithfully tended to her own vineyard, because she has spent so much time tending to the vineyards of those who are not faithful to the truth. The bride considers this to be a weakness and failure on her part wherein she has not faithfully ministered to those who would walk in faithfulness. Dear ones, the Lord first calls you to minister to your own vineyard before seeking to serve in reforming someone else's vineyard (begin by serving your own family, your own marriage, and serving in a faithful church before taking on the whole world). Jesus sent the man with a legion of demons back to his own home. The gospel begins there.

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