

## **Jesus, the Beloved Shepherd of My Soul**

Song of Solomon 1:7; John 10:3-5

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The Lord Jesus is the central figure in the Song of Solomon. He is the Heavenly Husband who set His infinite love upon a sinful bride and chose her from all eternity. His love for you whom He chose was so infinitely great that He, the Lord of glory, took upon himself the form of a servant and suffered and died to redeem you from the curse of your sin in order that He might have you with Him for all eternity in heaven.

Jesus is also in the Song of Solomon the glorious King who rules over and defends His chosen bride against all enemies that would destroy her. You will find love, comfort, and safety under His shadow as he draws you by the cords of love into His chambers of sweet communion (Song 1:4).

Jesus is also in the Song of Solomon the Good Shepherd who feeds you and leads you in the paths of truth and righteousness (Song 1:7). Without the Good Shepherd, you will as helpless sheep soon lose your way, wandering all over the ecclesiastical landscape looking for nourishing spiritual food, but exposing yourself to dangerous predators (false teachers), who are wolves in sheep's clothing. The Lord Jesus declared that those who are truly His sheep know His voice and they follow Him (John 10:3-5). The only reason you should listen to me as I preach is because you hear in my words the words of the Lord Jesus—the Good Shepherd. Dear ones, it is the Word of the living God that you have come to hear today, and not the perishing words of a mere man. Only Jesus—the Good Shepherd—can feed you everlasting bread in the gospel. You have not come to be entertained. You have come to be fed. Listen to Him as He speaks to you today from His Word.

The main points from our text are: (1) Love Expressed to the Good Shepherd; (2) The Place Where the Good Shepherd Feeds His Flock; (3) A Danger to Avoid.

### **I. Love Expressed to the Good Shepherd.**

A. The bride (the true church) continues to speak as we begin verse 7.

1. She had just confessed to “the daughters of Jerusalem” (who are weak Christians) that she was black from being scorched by the sun of affliction and persecution (Song 1:5) and from having to work in the heat of the day in the vineyards of false teachers (“my mother's children, Song 1:6). Though the world considers the faithful church to be ugly because of how she is despised and hated for her love and obedience to Jesus Christ, all that truly matters to her is that Jesus calls her “comely” or beautiful in His sight—just as the nail prints in His hands and the wound in His side is beautiful to every true child of God because it speaks of the everlasting and condescending love of Jesus for wretched sinners like you and me; so the scorched backs of persecuted saints and the suffering you have faced for your unwillingness to compromise or deny the truth of Jesus Christ is your proof of love to Him, and He calls you beautiful.

2. Whereas the bride (the true church) had just confessed both her ugliness in the sight of the world and yet her beauty in the sight of the Lord Jesus, the bride now turns her words to her beloved Husband, the Lord Jesus (Song 1:7).

B. Notice now how her heart beats with such expression of love for Him, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth” (Song 1:7).

1. She has demonstrated that love for Him by what she has been willing to suffer from others (her blackness in Song 1:5-6), but that love for Jesus is also expressed in her words as well. Dear ones, let not your love for each other in the home or in the church be only expressed in deeds, but in words as well. Many have the attitude that there is no need to express that love in words because they show it every day in

their deeds. However, both are necessary. Without the deeds of love, mere words will become meaningless. Without the words of love, the deeds will seem as a mere duty and nothing more. The bride not only suffers for Jesus (Song 1:5-6), but expresses in words her love (Song 1:7).

2. It is the boundless and underserving love of Jesus that calls forth this love from the mouth of the bride (1 John 4:19). Our love is simply a reciprocal love to His original love. The true Christian cannot but love (with a sacrificial love) the Lord Jesus when he/she knows how Jesus lived a perfect life, suffered and died to remove that sin forever and was raised from the dead to prove it is forever gone. If you do not understand your total corruption and depravity without Jesus Christ, if you do not grasp your total inability to rescue and save yourself because you were dead in your trespasses and sins, and if you do not realize that you deserved His just condemnation in the everlasting torment of hell, you will never truly love the Lord Jesus because you will not see and understand the infinite love that sent Him to the cross to rescue you from all of that. His love will simply seem ordinary and no great sacrifice. His love is unfathomable, and it will complete what it begins in your life.

3. When you truly understand and rejoice in Christ's love, there is nothing that will be too great of a sacrifice on your part to give unto Him as an expression of your love and gratitude for His sacrificial love—beginning with your life, your heart and affections, your dreams, your family, your past, present, and future, your possessions, your work, and your trials and afflictions. Love expresses itself to the Lord Jesus by withholding nothing from Him that you claim to be your own. Nothing! Will your love be perfect in this life? No! But your heart will be broken when you offend the One whom your soul loveth. You will grow in hating what He hates (breaking of His commandments) and loving what He loves (keeping His commandments). You cannot honestly say that you love the one that you do not mind offending—that is not the fervency of love, but is self-centeredness that has frozen the heart toward the Lord Jesus.

4. When the bride (the true church) endures suffering from others for standing faithful to Jesus Christ and that reproach upon her from the world and even from professing Christians has brought her so low by way of discouragement and rejection, where does she flee, where does she find comfort? She flees to Jesus Christ ("O thou whom my soul loveth"). Where do you flee, where do you find comfort? Many turn chiefly to drugs, to worldly counselors, to the pleasures of this life to drown their sorrow temporarily, to over-work themselves into a stupor, or they flee to sleep to escape discouragement and rejection. Here the bride flees to the one whom her soul loveth. Never let burdens part you from Jesus. Your trials must draw you to Him, not away from Him—that is evidence of your love for Jesus. Where do you go when you are hurting?

5. Dear ones, if you want to know how you grow in this sacrificial love of for Jesus Christ—it is yours in Christ. It grows as you learn of Christ from His Word. It grows as you spend time with Jesus in prayer. It grows as you are humbled by your sin and by His mercy toward you—never forgetting the sin and condemnation from which you have been rescued. It grows as you are filled with a thankful heart and rejoice in every blessing and benefit—for it is all His kisses of love to you.

## **II. The Place Where the Good Shepherd Feeds His Flock.**

A. Having expressed her love for Jesus, that love drives her to ask Him this question: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" In other words, "O Jesus, whom I love, please tell me where I can go to be fed by Thee and to find rest for my soul from the heat of persecution, trials, and afflictions?"

B. You see, dear ones, the work of God's Spirit and grace within the heart of the true Christian is to earnestly desire to be fed and sheltered by the Lord Jesus through faithful ministers who soundly preach the gospel and commandments of the Lord with the voice of the Good Shepherd whom the true Christian knows and loves. Any voice that is not heard in the preaching or in any part of worship that does not come from the voice of the Good Shepherd in Scripture is a voice from which the true sheep will flee.

1. If you do not earnestly long to hear the word of the Lord Jesus as you come to worship Him on the Lord's Day, or as you gather for family worship, or as you have your own secret worship, or as you hear the preaching of God's Word, or as you sing the Psalms, or receive the benediction, you should take that as a serious problem that must be addressed. Something is deeply wrong when one who professes to be a Christian and a lover of Jesus Christ does not long to hear Him speak to him/her through His Word. It is love for Jesus to want to be near Him (as close as possible) and to hunger and thirst to hear His voice and word more than anyone else's voice or word.

2. Where do you find rest for your soul, peace of mind, comfort in suffering, trials, temptations, persecution, rejection, and affliction? In the word of your Savior who never changes and whose word never changes and is forever true. It is through His Word that Jesus cleanses you, sanctifies you, protects you, defends you, assures you of His presence, gives you hope to persevere, and guarantees that the eternal glories of heaven are yours.

### **III. A Danger to Avoid.**

A. Here the bride issues herself a caution concerning a danger that she must avoid. That danger is expressed in the following words: "for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of the companions?" What is this danger that the true Christian must seek and pray to avoid? There are two chief interpretations of this danger to be avoided.

1. It is the danger of turning aside to hear those who falsely claim to be the companions/friends of the Good Shepherd. They profess to be Christians, but you do not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the gospel, commandments, doctrines, worship, or church government that they teach. They are false prophets (Matthew 7:15), false teachers (2 Peter 2:1); and false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13).

a. Dear ones, this is a grave danger to the sheep of Jesus Christ. Consider whether the voice of the Lord Jesus is heard in those who deny His deity, who deny the eternal torments of hell, who deny total depravity and the doctrines of grace, who deny that worship ought to be regulated only by the Word of God, who deny the abiding authority of God's Moral Law as found in the Ten Commandments, who deny that solemn covenants continue to bind the posterity of those who swore them, who deny that the civil magistrate (called to be the minister of God) should restrain false religion, idolatry, blasphemy, murder of unborn children, and all sexual immorality. The bride here in Song 1:7 warns herself that she must not turn aside and pitch her tent near the flocks of those who might profess to be the companions of Christ, but in what they teach there is not the word of the Savior faithfully proclaimed (as summarized in faithful Confessions, Catechisms, and Covenants).

b. This is what you will find in the text of early English versions of the Holy Scriptures: The Wycliffe Bible (1382-1385), The Coverdale Bible (1535), The Great Bible (1539), The Geneva Bible (1560), The Bishop's Bible (1568), and The King James Bible (1611).

2. The second interpretation of this danger that the bride warns herself about is found in the margin of the text of the King James Bible: "for why should I be as one that is veiled by the flocks of thy companions." This interpretation of the danger that the bride desires to avoid is that of being a veiled harlot among the faithful flocks of Christ's companions/ministers. It was then the practice of harlots to veil and cover their faces in order to hide their identity (Genesis 38:14-15).

a. So according to this reading the bride in Song 1:7 earnestly desires not to be a spiritual harlot among the faithful flocks and ministers of Christ's Church. She wants to avoid the danger of being a hypocrite who goes after other lovers in the world (like money, pleasure, work, family, lusts of the flesh, and easy and comfortable life) while she sits in the congregation of the righteous listening to the faithful preaching of God's Word. She prays that she will not be a hypocrite.

b. This is the interpretation that has been taken up by the versions of the Bible in the last 100+ years: English Revised Version (1885), American Standard Version (1901), New American Standard Bible (1971), New International Version (1978), and New King James Version (1982). It is important to note that this difference is not a textual difference, but is a difference based upon looking at the same Hebrew word, but choosing two different nuances in meaning of the same Hebrew verb. It seems to me that the **context** favors the first reading while **frequency** favors the second. Both dangers are real to the true Christian and must be avoided.

B. In either case, how will you avoid the danger (whether in being turned aside to false teachers, or in becoming a hypocrite among faithful teachers)? You will only avoid either of these danger by following the two previous main points: a fervent love for the Lord Jesus and an earnest search for a faithful ministry where you will hear the whole counsel of Jesus Christ taught in Scripture, defended, and unapologetically confessed in faithful, historical summaries of Scripture (like the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). Listen in closing to the Apostle Paul as he summarizes the purpose of the ministry that Jesus has given to His bride (Ephesians 4:12-15). May that faithful ministry grow and increase in love among us and throughout the whole world.

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