

When Jesus Seems to Hide Himself

Song of Solomon 2:8-9; Psalm 18:29

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Why are there times in the Christian life that after being overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord with His abundant love and mercy that Jesus seems to hide Himself from us? He seemed so near in a particular sermon, in a time of private prayer, or at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but then the following day or week, it's as if that same strong sense of His precious presence has taken the wings of a bird even though we continue to meet with Him in prayer and in His Word.

Let me assure you that this is not an unfamiliar experience to all Christians. The only time that this will no longer be a part of your Christian experience is when you see the Lord Jesus face-to-face in glory where all hindrances, sins, temptations, and sorrows will be forever removed and only uninterrupted communion with Jesus will be the experience of every Christian. Until that blessed time, we need to understand to some degree why the Lord Jesus gives us at certain times such a glorious expression of His grace that has us in tears, that melts our hard hearts, and that has us praising Him for such everlasting love for us and at other times He withdraws that blessed sense of His presence?

The chosen and beloved bride of Jesus Christ here in our text has this very same experience. Let us learn from our beloved Jesus what He is doing at such times for our good in order that the enemy of our soul not cast us into the depths of despair. The main points are: (1) Jesus Comes to His Elect Bride Leaping over Mountains (Song 2:8-9a); (2) Jesus Comes to His Elect Bride Hiding behind Walls (Song 2:9b).

I. Jesus Comes to His Elect Bride Leaping over Mountains (Song 2:8-9a).

A. Previously, we left the bride of Christ in the almighty arms and loving embrace of the Lord Jesus as they feasted together in blessed nearness and communion in the banqueting house (Song 2:4-7).

1. This speaks of the sweetness of Christ's presence with us when we have been overwhelmed by His love and mercy, by His patience and forbearance, by His gentleness and kindness with us and others. At such times we have known not only by faith that we have communion with Jesus, but He has also allowed us to sense His beloved presence with us to such an extent that we did not want it to end.

2. Communion with Jesus is to desire to be near Him and to enjoy Him. It is not communion with Jesus to have your heart and mind elsewhere, hoping for that time with Jesus to end soon. It is communion with Jesus to have a loving dialogue where He speaks to you by His Word and Spirit and you speak to Him through the fervency of your prayers. This is what the Lord delights to see in our worship at all times. We are not only to worship Him in truth by bringing only that to Him which He has authorized in His Word, but we are also to worship Him in spirit by communing with Him, drawing near to Him, and enjoying His presence.

B. As we now consider the continued words of the beloved bride and church of Jesus Christ, the scene has changed. Jesus and His bride are no longer enjoying that blessed nearness of the love feast in the banqueting house, but rather the bride all alone in the royal house. She is no longer in the loving embrace of Christ's almighty arms. That nearness of Christ has departed. She longs for Him. She waits for Him. And then suddenly off in the distance she hears His unmistakable voice as He draws nearer to her ("The voice of my beloved!" Song 2:8).

1. Even when the Lord Jesus is yet a distance away, her heart is stirred by the voice of her beloved. Before she looks out the window to behold Him coming, she first hears Him. Her ears are tuned to recognize His voice when He speaks—even from a distance. Perhaps you have been in a room of people, but

out of all those voices that could be heard, you could recognize your husband's voice or your wife's voice. Likewise, dear ones, the elect bride knows the voice of Jesus (John 10:4-5).

2. The true sheep of Jesus Christ do not want their ears to be tickled from the pulpit. They do not want to be taught that which is popular and approved by men. The true sheep simply want to hear the authoritative and loving voice of Jesus as it comes from Scripture in what is preached and taught from the pulpit. And having heard the voice of Jesus in Scripture, the true sheep of Jesus in love follow and obey that voice. This is an evidence of saving faith in Christ's sheep: they love to hear the gospel, doctrine, worship, and commandments of the Lord proclaimed to them from Scripture; for they hear His voice they know their Savior is near. They hear His voice and they rejoice (and they follow it). Dear ones, is the voice of Jesus in Scripture that is read and preached a delight and joy to you? If not, do you care? Are you searching your heart and life to see what may have plugged up your spiritual ears from hearing and your affections from receiving His Word and doing His Word?

3. Thus, when that nearness with the Lord Jesus that you previously enjoyed seems to be cool and distant, pray earnestly to the Lord that He would grant you ears to hear His authoritative and loving voice in the reading and preaching of Christ's truth in Holy Scripture. It is ordinarily not by miraculous and spectacular signs and wonders that you will know the Lord is near you, but is rather by His still small voice that is heard over the strong hurricane-like winds, earth-shaking quakes, and fiery lightning (as the Lord showed Elijah in 1 Kings 19).

B. Having heard the voice of her beloved Husband off in the distance as He announces His coming, she goes to the window and then she beholds Him as if he were like a deer or gazelle leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills (Song 2:8).

1. Observe the order presented here by the elect bride of Christ: She first hears His voice in Scripture; then she beholds His coming in greater nearness. It is through hearing His promises in His Word that you will be assured that He has not forgotten you, that He has engraved your name upon the palm of His hand, that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, that He will work all things together for your good, and that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. So often you want the nearness of Christ without taking the time to hear His voice through His promises and through His commandments. It is Jesus that always initiates and draws you, beginning with effectual calling and uniting you to Christ, and then in communion as well. You would have no desire to enjoy communion with Jesus and be near Him if He did not initiate that communion by first calling you and speaking to you through His Word.

2. Now the chosen bride beholds her beloved drawing near to her as He leaps upon mountains and springs upon hills to her. This pictures the Lord drawing near to her as unhindered and unrestricted as a bounding deer that seems to take flight over any obstacle in its way.

a. When Jesus draws near to you, dear brothers and sisters, nothing is able to keep Him from you (Romans 8:35-39). The mountains and hills of sin that you have committed, He has already paid for with His own infinitely precious life. He has leaped over the condemning wrath of God to come to you (that has been once and for all removed). He has overcome for you, the world, the flesh, and the devil. The mountain of trials, afflictions, sorrows, tribulations, and even death cannot keep Him from you. Even when you fall into sin, He comes to you.

b. The deer almost seems to delight in finding those fences or those rocks or those thorn bushes in the way just to demonstrate how easily it can leap over them. So likewise does the Lord Jesus with you His beloved saints who trust Him, love Him, and obey Him.

c. Christ's first coming in the flesh was long expected and desired by the saints of old. There were many insuperable mountains or obstacles (from a human perspective) that lay in the way to seeing Christ's coming realized (obstacles far greater than any of your own): the Son of God took on the nature of man; he perfectly obeyed, suffered as no man has ever suffered, and was crucified for elect sinners; he

performed the most amazing miracles; and he raised Himself gloriously from the dead. But all those mountains that seemed so great were powerfully leaped over by Jesus. Shall any mountain that you face be harder than the mountains Jesus faced?

d. The Lord Jesus does not ordinarily remove all the obstacles, problems, and hurdles in your life, but He does come to you leaping over all of them demonstrating that he is not bound by them, and they will not hinder Him in coming near to you to love you, comfort you, and encourage you. In fact, Jesus will use all of those mountains in your life as lessons in the School of Christ intended by the Lord to teach and train you that you can trust Him as you face that mountain; for His everlasting and unchangeable love for you will bring Him leaping over those mountains more than a mother rushing to the cry of her baby. As you trust Him and learn of Him, He will teach you how to leap with Him over all of those trials, temptations, and failures (Psalm 18:29).

II. Jesus Comes to His Elect Bride Hiding behind Walls (Song 2:9b).

A. As the Lord Jesus approaches ever nearer to the bride, notice that He doesn't bring her again into the banqueting house and embrace her around the table of His love. He rather draws nearer to her by various steps and degrees: from behind a wall, looking through a window, and showing Himself through a lattice. What would the Lord Jesus teach us here about the ways in which He comes near in communion with us?

1. First, note the steps Jesus often uses in coming to commune with us. After enjoying blessed communion with Christ, it is not unusual for Jesus to withdraw that overwhelming sense of His presence with you to a place where there is a seeming silence (Psalm 89:46); and then from a seeming silence to where you hear His still small voice in His Word from a distance calling out to you; and then from hearing His voice in His Word from a distant calling out to you to seeing and remembering Him from a distance leaping over all the obstacles in history (kingdoms, persecution, sickness, sin, failure, crises in marriage and work) that lie in His path; and then He draws ever closer, but seems to be behind the wall, looking through a window, and showing Himself in part through the lattice—gradually, slowly granting more and more discoveries of His love, mercy, patience, power, and sovereignty.

2. Second, consider what walls in your life have you built that hinder the Lord restoring unto you the joy of His salvation—unbelief, pride, jealousy, critical heart, discontentment, unrepentant disobedience to God's commandments, lusts of the flesh, love of money and the world more than the love of God, lack of charity in the home, lukewarmness, compromise of the truth, anger, resentment, and bitterness, etc. The Lord Jesus hides behind the wall of our heart. He is near. He is present. He is not only full of love for you, but is absolutely holy, and calls you to repent if you would enjoy that blessed fellowship with Him (Isaiah 59:1-2). He does not hide behind the wall to cast you away as rubbish or to destroy you, but to draw you to see that His love is a holy love.

3. Third, as the Lord Jesus is peering through the window or through the lattice, He is giving you a spiritual sight of Him through His ordinances. His ordinances are the ordinary window through which you behold the Lord Jesus. But also realize that through that window, He is casting His all-seeing and all-caring eye of love and affection upon you. He is beholding you with His care, with His tenderness, and with His patience. At such times, you are no less loved than when you feel so overwhelmed that you cannot contain the blessing of His presence.

B. The New Testament equivalent to the coming of Jesus that we find here in Song of Solomon is the coming of Jesus to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. The Lord Jesus had just been with His disciple in such a glorious time of communion as He multiplied the fish and bread to feed thousands. They were riding so high from this blessed time. The disciples were so blessed with Christ's presence with them. Then Jesus sent them by boat to cross the Sea while He went up to the mountain to pray. A mighty storm suddenly arose, the likes

of which they had never before faced. These were experienced fishermen, and yet they gave up all hope of survival until Jesus came leaping as it were upon the mountains of the waves that would seem to crush and destroy them. Actually, Jesus first saw His disciples struggling in the storm from afar on the surrounding mountain. He could have sovereignly prevented the storm in the first place or rescued His disciples before the storm began. Jesus saw what was happening, and He waited until they had reached the place where they realized they could not rescue themselves. Then Jesus came near to them in His almighty love and calmed the sea. He had been hidden to their sense and sight, and yet He was with them all along, and came near so that they could again see and feel His loving presence.

1. Dear ones, let not the enemy discourage you because you do not presently sense the fullness of His presence every moment of the day. Jesus is testing you in such times whether you will trust His promises that He is with you and whether you will long for greater expressions of His love and communion. Or whether you will only be able to survive when there are displays of the supernatural or only when you can sense and feel His presence with you. Will you walk by faith or by feelings?

2. Jesus is not playing games with you when He withdraws the sense of His presence. He is calling upon you to trust Him and love Him even when you are not enraptured by that overwhelming sense of His presence with you. We walk by faith not by sight. Jesus is calling you to desire Him and yearn for His loving presence all the more. He is giving you an appetite to hunger and thirst for Him. He is casting your longing eye upon that eternal and full communion with Him in heaven.

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