

Session 5 – Challenging the Comfort Zone – Songs 2:8- 17

A. INTRODUCTION:

1. As we approach this section of the Song, we enter into the second major phase of the Shulamite's journey into intimacy and authority. The tender words of the King have drawn her out of her crisis of shame and rejection, and into the sweet embrace of His presence in the House of Wine. Even though she is totally self-focused at this point (see 1:13-14), she has begun the dialogue of faith, receiving His affirmations and beginning to define herself according to the declarations of His Word. She has come to rest in His presence, safely walled in by the King's charge that she not be disturbed until He chooses to awaken her and call her forth.

⁸ The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. ¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, ¹¹ for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. ¹² The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come away. ¹⁴ O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. ¹⁵ Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom." ¹⁶ My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. ¹⁷ Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains

2. In this second phase, the voice of the King calls her out of the comfort zone of the House of Wine. This summons is for the purpose of deepening her experience of intimacy, to teach her how to find the safety and joy of His presence in the face of challenging circumstances. Because of the nature of this call – the challenge of facing the fears of past hurts and failures – the Shulamite experiences a crisis of faith, refuses the invitation, and enters a dark night of divine discipline.
3. In Song 1:4 the maiden prayed, "Draw me and we will run after you." A spiritual crisis in her life begins as Jesus now introduces the "Let us run" phase of her life. In Song 1:5-7, she faced her first spiritual crisis as she discovered her *sin*. Now she faces her second crisis as she discovers her *fear*.

B. THE SOVEREIGN KING

⁸ The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag

1. The sound of His voice. The Bridegroom's word is the source of all our identity, hope, and joy. To hear the sound of His voice is to touch reality in a profound way. One of the main purposes of the first phase of the journey is to become accustomed to His voice, so that when He calls us into uncomfortable situations we can know it is safe even though challenging.

John 3:29: ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

John 10:27: ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

2. A New Revelation: Jesus as the Sovereign King

Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills

There are several things in this little verse that awaken the Bride, and catch her attention. She has recognized the voice of the One she loves, but He is no longer speaking tenderly to her in the comfortable confines of the bridal chamber. Instead, His voice sounds as He comes in His strength, leaping upon mountains and skipping upon hills.

Zechariah 4:7: Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"

Mark 11:23: Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

- a) "Mountains" speak of natural or spiritual obstacles that hinder us in the pursuit of faithful obedience. They also speak of natural or spiritual governmental structures, and the power they exert over our lives.
- b) "Hills" represent smaller difficulties, personal obstacles that confront us as we follow Jesus.

The picture here is that Jesus, the Sovereign King, is not restrained in any way by these obstacles. He leaps over them, runs upon them as though they are nothing. His authority is complete, and He is the solution to every issue that confronts us.

3. The Shulamite's Wonder at Jesus' Authority and Power

⁹ ***My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag***

Things that are mountains and hills to us are no barrier for this King. He is not intimidated or restrained in any way in His pursuit of us, or in His plan to bring us to perfection by grace.

C. JESUS CHALLENGES THE BRIDE'S COMFORT ZONE

⁸ ***Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice***

1. The King's new position behind their wall. In the first phase of the journey, the King built a wall of protection around the Shulamite for the purpose of establishing intimacy and confidence in His voice. Now He has moved behind the wall for the purpose of calling the Bride to new levels of intimacy and trust. The wall of protection has now become her comfort zone, and it is time to draw her after Him so that intimacy can be established in the places that have been fearful and challenging to her.
2. The King draws the Shulamite with the power of His gaze. Jesus' gaze is fixed upon the Bride, seeing her as she really is – in love with Him, longing to follow after Him. She will have to choose to leave her comfort zone, for His love will never violate the free will He has given us. He longs for her to respond to His invitation with eager obedience. The wall He has built has openings to it, so that the Shulamite may see with eyes of vision and hope. The King is drawing her into her destiny, but she must respond with faith rooted in love and trust.

D. THE CALL TO BRIDAL PARTNERSHIP

¹⁰ *My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,* ¹¹ *for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone.* ¹² *The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.* ¹³ *The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come away.*

1. There are several things to notice here in this first phrase:
 - a) It is the voice of the Beloved that is calling her to come. In the first phase of their relationship, the King declared that the Shulamite should not be disturbed until the right time. He is now announcing that the time has come, although this announcement takes her by surprise. His goal for her is not only intimate communion in the secret place; His goal for her is intimate authority so that she has full partnership with Him in His plans for the earth. We see the parallel again in Esther – there is real possibility of danger (mountains and hills) but in intimacy we will come through with authority.
 - b) He affirms her identity as the one He loves. He calls her “my love, my fair one,” declaring the truth of who she is to Him, and therefore who she truly is and is becoming. Though she has not yet said “yes” to the invitation, she is the focus of His attention. “Come on you can do this!” He understand how hard it is, he understands the journey, the pressure, the cost and He will see us through because His banner over us is love.
 - c) When Jesus called Simon to a life of discipleship, He knew that Peter would have a journey filled with twists and turns, successes and failures. Yet Jesus declared Simon’s true identity as Peter, the rock, who under Jesus’ leadership would become an apostle and a fisher of men.
 2. The Shulamite is called to the process of maturing in partnership with the King. She is summoned out of the comfort zone into the process of growing in trust and confidence in the King as her leader and partner. Though the call is strong, her response is voluntary. She must choose to leave the comfort zone and follow Him because of desire, not compulsion.
 3. The Invitation is to Participate in the Coming Harvest
 - a) **The winter is past** – the season of darkness, hiddenness, and trial has developed her personal history of intimacy, but that season is now shifting.
 - b) **The rain is over and gone** – the trials of wintertime are now behind her.
 - c) **The flowers appear on the earth** – the first indicators of harvest are now appearing, and she must prepare for the season of harvest.
 - d) **The time of singing has come** – there is a renewal of singing and joy in her heart as the season of new life begins.
 - e) **The voice of the turtledove is heard** – the sound of the dove, the presence of the Holy Spirit, indicates the new season is truly upon us.
 - f) **The fig tree puts forth her green figs** – the early fruit forming on the trees indicates the coming season of fruitfulness and harvest.
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- g) **The vines with the tender grapes give a good smell** – there is the sure sign of emerging fruit in the Shulamite’s life.

4. The Shulamite is called again to follow her King.

Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come away.

The King desires that the Shulamite would not only have a history of intimacy with Him in the secret place, but also in the activity of ministry. This invitation involves facing painful and challenging issues, but His promise is that He will be with her. The King is gentle but insistent. He is motivated by the vision of her fullness, but He also has an inheritance in the matter – a Bride with whom He can share His authority. It is the longing and passion of His heart to have such a Bride.

E. THE BRIDE IS INVITED TO A PLACE OF MORE EXTRAVAGANT WORSHIP

¹⁴ ***O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely***

- a) **O my dove** – the King embraces the Bride in her weakness and fragility, knowing that her heart is toward Him, but still fearful. A dove speaks of purity and loyalty. He knew that she would initially compromise (2:17), but that it was in her heart to obey Him.
- b) **In the clefts of the rock** – here He draws her into a higher revelation of His own suffering, which in fact is a place of safety for her. God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock—an open space or gap in the mountain rock—to protect him from being struck dead by seeing the glory of God’s face. This speaks of the tomb in the rock where Jesus was laid – as we enter into His suffering we are able to experience the glory of God in our lives.
- c) **In the crannies** (secret places) **of the cliff**. The Hebrew word used here that is translated crannies or secret places is *bā·sê·ter am·maq·rê·qāh* which when translated means the in the secret place of the stairs. This is the mystery of the resurrection which opens the way for us to enter into the presence of God. The invitation is to “Come up here”.
- d) **Let me see your face, let me hear your voice** – the worship and adoration that comes from us in places of challenge and fear is even more precious to Jesus than times of worship in the bridal chamber. It is costly to face the challenge of the mountains, the specter of suffering, and then to lift our face and our voice in worship and not give in to the idea that God has abandoned us. He wants to use the situation to take us to a higher place of authority. To take us over the mountain and teach us to dance on it. The mountain that resists us is the place in which He wants to give us authority so that we can become deliverers of people who are stopped by that same mountain. The enemy wants to use it to stop you – the Lord wants to bring us through in maturity with authority. This is how we fight the addictions and strongholds in our lives. This is the power of worship.
- e) **Your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely** – He affirms His own desire for her beauty. Some think that when they struggle with sin, their voice is repulsive to God, and their face is ugly to Him, but God wants us to run to Him in confidence, instead of from Him in condemnation.

F. DELIVERANCE FROM COMPROMISE

¹⁵ *Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.*"

1. The Shulamite responds to the King's exhortation to see her face and hear her voice as she prays for deliverance. She cries out for Jesus' help to catch the little foxes of compromise in her life. Foxes are cunning animals that will destroy a vineyard under cover of the night. They are not bold strong lions that attack during the day. They are small, fast, and crafty and are hard to catch. The "little foxes" in the vineyard of our heart speak of our small compromises. This is not referring to defiance of the Word, but to her fear to "to arise" They are also the situations and works that can distract us from what God would have us do including being drawn away into other people's agendas.
2. She doesn't want these compromises in her life to distract her from entering into the fullness of what He has for her. Her vineyard is in blossom – blossom promises fruit. She wants to become a fruitful vine but the little foxes of compromise and distractions are preventing her from coming into fruitfulness by spoiling the vine.
3. She cried out that the He would sustain and refresh her because she was lovesick (Song 2:5). She sees the seriousness of small areas that prevent her from going deep in God. She cries out to Him to help catch the foxes. She knows she cannot do this on her own she needs His help. She acknowledges the presence of the little foxes (her compromise) in her life and then offers continual prayer for help. The Lord is so willing to help us.
4. The question is will we give into the temptation to give into the familiar and predictable or will we choose the more fearsome way of risky obedience to the voice of the King?
5. Her response is to affirm her commitment to follow the Beloved. She has had a fundamental change in her heart, and now recognizes that she belongs to Him.

¹⁶ *My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies.*

Though her priority is still her agenda (**My beloved is mine**), she feels the pull of His claim on her life (**and I am His**). She knows who she is as a lover of God. When we struggle, we do not cease to be a genuine lover of God nor do we cease to be loved by God. Our face does not cease to be beautiful to God and our voice in worship does not become offensive to Him.

6. She sees Jesus as her Beloved or the One she loves. She declares, "I am His." Jesus' ownership over her heart will eventually be seen in her life. Her heart is His; it belongs to Him. Her love for God is expressed in the midst of her stumbling. She does not feel cast aside by the Lord because of her struggle. She is not a hopeless hypocrite. Her confidence is steadfast. She cries, "I know You are mine and that am Yours. I am not drawing back." She is sincere yet not mature.
 7. She knows that her fulfillment is with Him, where He feeds His flock. She longs to be among the lilies, the people who know His voice and follow Him wherever He goes. Lilies speak of purity. In Song 2:1, "I am the lily of the valley," the lily is in the singular as she discovers her personal identity in the Lord. However, here the lilies are in the plural as they speak of the corporate people of God who love Jesus like she does.
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G. THE CRISIS OF FEAR AND UNBELIEF LEADS TO COMPROMISE

¹⁷ *Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains*

1. The Shulamite is afraid to follow the King into the adventure, because her fear is still greater than her trust. She wants to wait for greater maturity and more revelation – **“until the day breathes and the shadows flee away. . .”** She is aware of the dark shadows in her life and wants to wait until the Holy Spirit has breathed on them and she is clean before she feels able to follow Him onto the mountains and hills that have defeated her in the past. Until the shadows flee away – until she’s clearer about the path ahead she hesitates to move. She doesn’t have the faith to respond to his prompting because she is not clear about the detail and she is fearful she’ll fail.
2. She continues to affirm her love for the King, calling Him “my Beloved.” This is the dilemma of immaturity and fear – knowing that we love Him, and yet we are fearful of trusting Him in the areas where we have known defeat. She wants further revelation – not to know Him better, but to depend on her understanding instead of on His love and trustworthiness. She will not grow in love or in faith until she follows Him, but here she is unable/unwilling to do so.
3. Her fear leads to an inevitable separation – **“be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains”** or **“the mountains of Bether”** The Hebrew word “bether” literally means “separation, or division,” and so she names the mountains for the place of separation that her decision causes.
4. The King leaves her alone to face the loneliness of her unbelief. In order to go deeper in relationship with Him, and in order to progress toward the goal of intimate authority, she will have to follow Him at some point. He withdraws from her, not because He is angry or wants to reject her. Rather, His withdrawal is a strategic move to draw her further into obedience and intimacy. He is always wooing her to come further, to press in more fervently that she might receive the fullness of His plan for her. Jesus honors our voluntary decision to draw back. Our relationship with Jesus is based on voluntary love.

H. FOUR KEY STATEMENTS OF PROGRESSION

1. There are four times in the Song that we see the Shulamite use the phrase “my Beloved” but there is a progression as she moves from being self-centered to being God-centered. Four times throughout the book she changes and redefines her experience. She starts from being only self-conscious and ends up with a mature God-centeredness. We can follow her maturity throughout the Song through these four statements that are in strategic places. They are statements of the progression of her maturity.
2. Her initial focus is **only** upon her spiritual pleasure. This is acceptable to Jesus as a beginning place in the grace of God. Her only focus is that she is loved and has an inheritance in Him. She has little regard at this stage for His inheritance in her.

¹³ *My beloved is to me... (1:13-14)*

3. In her second focus she is saying, “He is mine, He belongs to me. However, I now realize that I also belong to Him.” She now adds a new dimension of His ownership of her life. She now sees the necessity of loving Him because she is His inheritance. However, it is her secondary concern at this stage of maturity.

¹⁶ *My beloved is mine and I am his. (2:16)*

4. In her third focus she is saying the same words as 2:16, but she changes the order. She says, “I belong to Him and I continue to acknowledge that He is still mine. He belongs to me. My beloved is mine.” The third progression says the same two truths but the order changes. She says, “It is His agenda first and my agenda second.” She reverses the priority of her concern. His inheritance in her is now first in her heart. Her inheritance in Him is vital, yet secondary.

³I am my beloved's and he is mine. (6:3)

5. In her fourth and final focus she is saying, “I belong to Him and what He desires is all I focus on. The fact that His desire is for me makes me want to make sure that I am 100 percent His. He owns me entirely. His concerns are what I care about most.”

¹⁰I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me. (7:10)

6. This is the transition from a self-centered to a God-centered focus in the four inheritance statements (1:14; 2:16; 6:3; 7:10). In the beginning stages, her own enjoyment of Jesus is her only focus. She talks about what He is to her without much awareness of what she is to Him. In 2:16 and 6:3 and then finally 7:10, she uses this same language but changes the order to express her concern about what she is to Jesus. She is His inheritance.