Session 12 – Maturing Partnership – 6:11 – 7:9

The Shulamite

[11] I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. [12] Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince. (chariots of Ammi-Nadib)

Daughters

[13] Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you.

The Shulamite

Why should you look upon the Shulamite, as upon a dance before (the company of) two armies? (dance of Mahanaim)

Daughters

How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. [2] Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. [3] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. [4] Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks towards Damascus. [5] Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.

The Beloved

[6] How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! [7] Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. [8] I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, [9] and your mouth like the best wine.

The Shulamite

It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth (causing the lips of sleepers to speak)

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The last sections of this book are more about the bride in maturity and so we can often find this more difficult to enter into. The full expression of our maturity will be at the return of Jesus when the pure and spotless bride cries out with the Spirit for Him to come. Nevertheless as we grow in partnership with Him we should touch on maturity in areas of our life although we may well find ourselves back in the earlier sections of the book in others. Knowing what full maturity looks like helps us have a sense of destiny which helps us cast off restraint (distractions, disappointment, disillusionment) and press on for the goal.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

2. The church is mostly addicted to activity ministry when we should be Jesus addicted and then respond in Him to go into ministry with Him. Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing. He told us we are no longer in a master/servant relationship. We are not intended to work for God like the older brother. He now calls us friends and invites us to enter into His ministry in intimate communion. It is often in that joint ministry that we find sweet and joyful communion with Him..

3. By understanding her value to the King (6:4-10), the Bride learns to see the value that others have to the King. She sees they are also His garden and inheritance. She commits to serve the immature ones in God's garden (6:11) and is overcome by love for the Church (6:12). The daughters express intense desire to be with her in her dance of love (6:13) and declare the beauty that has been revealed (7:1-5) The King then speaks of the great grace that has been released in and through her (7:6-9).

4. The primary calling for each ministry is to know God and to make Him known, working together with others to build the Church and engage in the Great Commission to make disciples.

Matt. 16:18 I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Matt. 28:19-20 Go…make disciples of all the nations…teaching them to observe all things… ()

B. THE BRIDE'S PASSION FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST

[11] I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. [12] Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince. (chariots of Ammi-Nadib)

5. The Bride has given herself to the King, and her love for Him has caused her to love what He loves. She extends herself to see the beauty of God's people, thriving in the context of the fallen world (she "goes down"). The Church is compared to a walnut grove (the nut orchard). Walnuts have several qualities:
    a. They provide great shade, a place of refreshing and protection
    b. The oil of walnuts is used to make soap, a source of cleansing
    c. The leaves are fragrant and are used to make healing ointment
    d. Walnuts have hard shells which must fall to the ground and die before the fruit will appear.

6. ***to look at the blossoms of the valley.*** The low places of life are where the fruit grows – the fruit of Christ likeness comes forth out of our valleys. She too found her growth in the valley places (2:1) so she is willing to go and bless others who are maturing through their experience in the valleys. She sees the potential of the blossom.

7. ***to see whether the vines had budded.*** The budding vineyard speaks of emerging, immature fruitfulness. The Bride is committing herself to embrace and assist immature believers as they grow in grace. This is God's vineyard – the church (Isaiah 5:1; Matthew 20:1; John 15:1ff)

8. ***whether the pomegranates were in bloom.*** The Church is compared to a blossoming pomegranate. This speaks of the first stages of individual believers coming to maturity, developing the sweetness of the character of Jesus.

9. ***Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince. (chariots of Ammi-Nadib).*** Before the Shulamite realises it her intercession lifts her up in ecstatic joy and sets her next to her beloved in his chariot. This depicts the zeal she feels for others – her soul moved like a chariot. The chariot was the most efficient and easily moved vehicle of that day. Designed for speed and safety in battle, it was powered by mighty horses, durable and potent as a weapon. Before she was even aware of it, the Shulamite begins to wage the war of intercession for the people of God. They have become noble in her sight, and her heart is now easily moved to pray for the Church.

10. She has been caught up in a passion to serve God's people. Mature love has broken through and the spirit of intercession has fallen on her. Instead of being put off by the immaturity, pride, wrong application of the Word and lack of discernment of these "budding vines" she is more surprised by the tender compassion that she feels.

11. God loves the whole church, not just the part we're involved in. Zeal for the whole church is foundational to the unity of the body of Christ. We need to care about God's larger purposes for His church not just our own little piece of the picture. We need to value the immature and the budding. The Bride's heart to serve the young speaks of more than serving to find a place to be recognized and feel better about ourselves. This is a call to give ourselves to others because we see them as the Lord's inheritance, not as an opportunity for us to open doors or promote our ministry status.

C. THE BRIDE IS AFFIRMED AND BLESSED BY THE BODY OF CHRIST

[13] Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon you.

1. The Shulamite has left to go down to the garden to meet her Beloved and bless others but the daughters cry out four times for her to return to be with them. For those with immature faith it is sometimes easier to see Jesus through the mature believers. She has released the fragrance of Christ amongst them and they don't want to lose that. They want her to stay and impart more. The Ephesians reacted similarly in Acts 20.

[37] And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, [38] being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

2. This is the only place in the book that she is called the Shulamite. Solomon and Shunem (the place where she grew up from which she gets her name) come from the same root word which means peace. Jesus and His bride have the same name.

Why should you look upon the Shulamite, as upon a dance before (the company of) two armies? (dance of Mahanaim)

3. This seems like a strange phrase and to understand it we need to look at where the word *Mahanaim* comes from. This word which translates as *two camps* can be found in Genesis 32.

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. [2] And when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

4. Commentators differ in their interpretation of the use of this description. Some believe this statement is made by the watchmen (the church leadership) and relates to Mahanaim as the place where Jacob and Esau had their confrontation in Genesis 32 over the issue of the birthright that the younger brother stole from the older brother. They interpret this as the conflict between the daughters and the watchman related to how they viewed the Bride. There are always two extreme positions in the body of Christ—those who pursue Jesus with fervency and those who do not. Wholeheartedness is at the core of some divisions. The watchmen do not understand why the daughters would be so overcome by the bride's zeal for her Beloved.

5. The second interpretation believe this statement is made by the Shulamite in response to the daughters cry. She does not see why they should seek after her and refers to her situation as like the dance of the angels in Genesis 32 (God's camp) At Mahanaim Jacob encountered two companies of angels which is why he gave it its name. Mahanaim is the place where angels dance over the one who returns to his destiny. Jacob was the

Old Testament prodigal son returning to his father's house. The Shulamite responds to the daughters *"Whqt do you see in me? Is it like the dance of angels?"*

6. The Body of Christ praises the mature attributes of the Bride. In this section, the Daughters answer the question as to why they place such value on the Shulamite. The challenge for the Bride is to receive the blessing but not be moved by it. We are only to be moved by the voice of the Bridegroom speaking to us.

    a. ***How beautiful are your feet in sandals*** (7:1a) – Her "feet in sandals" speaks of new authority in evangelism, the "beautiful feet" of those who bring the good news of the gospel of peace (Isaiah 52:7).
    b. ***O noble (Prince's) Daughter*** (7:1b) – This is how we know it is the Daughters speaking to her. The King never speaks in the third person. This is the Body of Christ recognising the beautiful anointing that is on the Bride, and affirming her royal identity as one who has been born again in the King's bloodline.
    c. ***Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.*** (7:1c,d) – This phrase speaks of the muscular definition of her legs, her spiritual walk that has been formed under the direction of the King's skilled leadership. Her spiritual walk has been conformed to His (see 5:15).
    d. ***Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine*** (7:2a,b) – The early foundations of her inner life were established in a healthy way as God nourished her. The navel is the vehicle of nourishment in the womb, and she has come to full healing and restoration in her inner life.
    e. ***Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies*** (7:2c,d) – This speaks of the end-time harvest that is about to emerge from the mature Bride. The word "waist" is the Hebrew word for "womb." The Shulamite is about to give birth to a bountiful harvest, which will come forth is purity and holiness (the "lilies" refer to the beauty of holiness).
    f. ***Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle*** (7:3a,b) – The breasts speak of the power to nurture the spiritual babies that will be born into the Kingdom of God through power evangelism. The twins refer to a double portion of anointing to feed and nourish immature believers.
    g. ***Your neck is like an ivory tower*** (7:4a) – Her free will has been formed in beauty and strength, a place of safety for herself and those around her. Ivory is rare and costly.
    h. ***Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim*** (7:4b,c) – The Shulamite has developed spiritual vision, clear revelation, with purity, innocence, and loyalty. The pools at Heshbon were noted for their clean, pure water, so this speaks of purity and clarity in revelation. The spirit of Jezebel hates the prophetic movement and wants to destroy our prophetic insight by filling our sight with impurity.
    i. ***Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus*** (7:4d,e) – This speaks of discernment in spiritual warfare concerning the enemy's activity.
    j. ***Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel*** (7:5a) – Her thoughts are pure as the white snow on the mountain, forming a strong defence against the enemy's attack. The helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) also speaks of confident hope in Jesus' strength that protects our thoughts.
    k. ***and your flowing locks are like purple*** (7:5b) – Her hair speaks of the dedication and loyalty of a Nazirite warrior. It is regal in its nature because of God's empowering, and reflects the authority and grace of a loyal warrior Bride that is in full agreement with her King. Purple is made by the mixing of blue and red – the blue of the heavens and the red of the earth – divinity and humanity in perfect union.
    l. ***a king is held captive in the tresses*** (7:5c) – The dedication, loyalty, and purity of the Bride have captured the heart of Jesus. He is held captive by the Bride's strong resolve to do the will of God whatever it costs her.

7. We rejoice that Jesus loves us in our weakness, and joyfully embraces us in our immaturity. But we must understand there is a higher degree of pleasure in Jesus' heart for those who demonstrate faithfulness over time that is rooted and empowered by love.

D. THE BRIDE IS AFFIRMED AND EMPOWERED BY THE KING

1. In verse 6 the speaker changes from the Daughters to the King Himself. Jesus is now giving voice to the passion in His heart which affirms and vindicates the Bride to all who hear.

. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, [9] ***and your mouth like the best wine.***

2. He is enthralled with her beauty and delighted by her character
    a. ***How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights!*** 7:6a,b) – The King exults in the Bride's beauty, and declares His pleasure over her life. She is His one true love, and her character and behavior delights Him in countless ways.
    b. ***Your stature is like a palm tree*** (7:7a) – Jesus is speaking of her deep-rooted maturity that stands in the winds of adversity and blessing without being swayed. She has become like a tree planted by rivers of water, constantly fruitful (see Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8).
    c. ***and your breasts are like its clusters*** (7:7b) – This is the power of the Bride to nurture others in the Body of Christ with the delicious fruit of her life.

3. The King releases the impartation of His full power and authority to her. ***I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit*** (7:8a,b) – Jesus is speaking here of His intention to give full authority and power to His Bride. "I will climb" means to release His manifest Presence with all power and authority. He takes hold of her branches, meaning that her activity now becomes empowered and directed by Jesus Himself. The two are becoming one and the fruit which she is producing is for Him.

4. Jesus releases three prophetic commissions to the mature Bride:
    a. ***Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine*** (7:8c) – The nurture that she gives to others will now be filled with the power and anointing of the wine of the Holy Spirit.
    b. ***and the scent of your breath like apples*** (7:8d) – Her breath is the influence that comes from her inner life. Her breath is to be refreshing and delightful to others.
    c. ***and your mouth like the best wine wine*** (7:9a) – The mouth always speaks of intimate communion between the Bridegroom and the Bride. Jesus is saying here that even as she moves into mature power ministry, the Bride's secret life of intimacy with Jesus will continue to be most sweet and intoxicating.

5. The Bride responds with pleasure at the effect her relationship with Jesus. (The Bride is the speaker here. The term "my Beloved" is what she calls the King. He calls her "My love, My beautiful one, My fair one).
    a. ***It goes down smoothly for my beloved*** (7:9b) – She is pleasing to the King, offering Him no resistance or bitterness. The wine of the Holy Spirit, whether in empowering for ministry (Acts 2:15), refreshing the Bride (Ephesians 5:18), or moving in judgment on the nations (Revelation 16:9) does not trouble or disturb her.
    b. ***gliding over lips and teeth (causing the lips of sleepers to speak)*** (7:9c) – With gentleness and compassion she moves the hearts of the sleeping Church, awakening them to new life. She relates now to the unawakened Church with tenderness and patience, not offended or irritated with them. She is the fiery Bride with a gentle spirit who stirs their hearts.

Eph. 5:14 "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."