Session 3 – The Paradox of Grace – Dark but Lovely – Songs 1:5 -11

A. INTRODUCTION:

The testimony of the Bride's journey begins with her experience of the paradox of grace. She grapples with her darkness, the weakness of her own spiritual character, in the light of the tender mercies of the Bridegroom's love. The Shulamite wrestles with the paradox that "in my weakness I am lovely," and attempts to digest the thought that the King enjoys her even while she is in the process of becoming mature.

B. THE PARADOX OF GRACE – "DARK BUT LOVELY"

Song Of Solomon 1:5-6a: I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. [6] Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me.

1. The Bride's Two-fold Confession of Faith – "I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem." The beginning of this journey requires a starting place of humility on the part of the Bride. She must recognise that there is darkness in her – weakness and immaturity that will be overcome by the King's grace as she walks with Him in obedience and faith. This weakness is not to be confused with rebellion. However, there is also great hope, because the King sees her as lovely. He sees the end from the beginning, and knows the power of His love to complete the process of her maturity.

   It is essential that we have a realistic appraisal of the condition of our own hearts apart from the grace of God. If He leaves us to ourselves, we will not walk in His ways (see Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:15ff). One of the first effects of drawing near to Jesus is to realise and admit that while He has no darkness in Him, there are still areas of sinfulness in our hearts, just below the surface.

   Song of Solomon 1:5: I am dark . . . like the tents of Kedar.

   Luke 5:8: When Simon Peter saw (the miracle of the fish), he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

   God shows us the darkness of our hearts so that:

   a) We will guard and purify our passion for Him.

   b) So that we will experience the truth of His unconditional love and forgiveness. We must receive the truth that He declares His affections for us with the full knowledge of our weakness and sin. He does not ignore or deny our sin - He knows us better than we know ourselves, and yet loves us completely.

   Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

   c) The "tents of Kedar" speak of the outward condition of our lives – discoloured and weather-beaten from much use and from difficult circumstances. The inward brokenness of our hearts has a direct effect on our countenance.

2. The loveliness of her true identity in Christ. Though we must be aware of our darkness – not through introspection but through the loving conviction of the Holy Spirit – the main focus of this first season of the journey is that we begin to agree with the King concerning how He sees us.

a) Jesus sees us as lovely because He sees with the Father's eyes, and knows us as we will be when the journey is complete.

Philippians 1:6: . . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

1 John 3:2: Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

b) He sees us like "the curtains of Solomon" – the curtains in the temple – beautifully woven.

c) Five reasons why we are beautiful to God

i. The finished work of Jesus on the cross

ii. The willing spirit that God gave us at our new birth

iii. The kindness of God's personality – He is filled with burning love and desire, with compassion and patience, and has focused those attributes on us!

iv. Our eternal destiny to become the Lamb's wife – He chose us for this purpose

v. The virtues of grace that He alone sees as they emerge

C. FACING HER "DARKNESS" – THE STRUGGLE WITH SHAME AND ACCUSATION

1. Brokenness and sin cause us to be ashamed in the gaze of the Beloved

Do not look upon me because I am dark . . . (Song 1:6a)

When we are exposed to the light of Jesus' perfection, we become so conscious of our own sin and shame. Peter reacted to Jesus' presence and power by saying "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8)

2. She is darkened as a result of living in a fallen world

. . . because the sun has tanned me. (Song 1:6b)

We are dark because we have been born in sin, and because we live in a fallen and broken environment. The presence of the light of Jesus exposes this condition, but He does not come to accuse, but to heal and restore.

3. She is wounded by the attitudes and reactions of others.

My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards . . . (Song 1:6c)

Like all broken people, the Shulamite has looked sideways for her affirmation and identity.

To the woman He said, ". . . your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

The "Mother's sons" – through the whole Song the "mother" symbolises the Church, and her sons the other members of the Body of Christ. They were never intended to give us our identity, but only to be vehicles of the Father's voice as He speaks to us. Those with the power over her exercise that power with harshness and self-serving motives. In her efforts to find identity and significance, she has submitted to their agenda in a wrong way, and has become bruised and darkened in the process.

4. The result of this shame and rejection is the neglect of her own spiritual condition

. . . and my own vineyard I have not kept. (Song 1:6d)

As long as we are bent toward the voice of others, there is no possible way to walk in the freedom and power of our true identity in Christ. We cannot cultivate the garden of our own heart while we are merely responding to the desires of others.

Her only hope is to become a person of "one thing," to hear and believe the voice of the Bridegroom as He declares her true identity.

D. THE BRIDE'S CRY FOR MORE OF THE KING'S LOVE

Song of Solomon 1:7: Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?

This is the Bride's first desperate cry to return to the place of first love, to hearing the Bridegroom's voice so that her joy might be restored and become full. She is longing for the presence of Jesus, yearning to break away from religious activity and other people's agendas, to hear His Word and come to rest in His love.

1. She sees herself as a Lover of God

Tell me, O You whom I love . . . (Song 1:7a)

The Shulamite remembers the joy of hearing His voice at the beginning of their relationship, and declares that she is a lover of God. This is so important, because even in our weakness, we can know that we love Jesus, and that He will draw us out of our darkness into the light of His love.

2. The maiden longs to be to fed by Him and recover her sense of nearness to Him (1:7).

Tell me . . . where You feed Your flock, (Song 1:7b)

In her crisis, she cries out to Him in desperation. She is saying: *"I have been fed by others, but now I want You to feed me and satisfy the cry of my heart."* She remembers the sweetness of her communion with God in her times spent in His "chamber" (1:4). She asks for counsel, *"Tell me, where do you feed Your flock?"* This is an expression of her prayer, "Draw me away." She is desperate to encounter Jesus. Ministry activity and even promotion will never be enough. Bible teachers can inspire and point us to the green pastures of truth. However, for truth to feed our heart, we must turn it into a dialogue with Jesus.

She is weary of second-hand experience, and wants to hear Him directly speak to her heart. She realises that she can never find rest in giving herself to other people's agendas. She must find a depth of relationship that will produce rest even in the most intense pressures of life.

Psalms 62:1: Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation.

3. She longs to be satisfied with Jesus.

where You make it rest at noon. (Song 1:7b)

She cries out, *"Where will You satisfy me, even in the heat of the day?"* At noon, or in the heat of the day, sheep will lie down if their stomachs are full. God wants us to rest in the midst of the heat of the day (life pressures) by connecting with Him.

4. She is desperate to have her veil of shame removed, and to know the joy of total freedom in His presence.

Song of Solomon 1:7c: For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?

2 Corinthians 3:16-18: Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. [17] Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. [18] But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

This is the cry of her heart, the longing to know Jesus in full freedom without shame, and to be transformed into His likeness. This is the journey of the Shulamite, and it is our journey as well.

Many sincere, repentant believers expect to be rebuked after seeing their sin and weakness. The Bridegroom King speaks comfort to the heart of His people when addressing their sin and shame. He wants the spirit of shame and rejection to be broken off their hearts.

The Lord promised to give Jerusalem double honor in place of her shame (Isa. 61:7) and commands us to speak comfort to her after her many years of shame (Isa. 40:1-2).

[7]Instead of your shame you shall have double honour…therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isa. 61:7)

[1]"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. [2]"Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her…that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD'S hand double [honor] for all her sins." (Isa. 40:1-2)

The Lord gives a new name to His people to show He delights in them (Isa. 62:4-5). He reveals His heart as a Bridegroom in removing shame from His people (Isa. 54:4-8).

[4]You shall no longer be termed Forsaken…but you shall be called Hephzibah…for the LORD delights in you…[5]as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:4-5)

[4]You will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth…[5]For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts…[8]But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you." (Isa. 54:4-8)

E. THE BRIDEGROOM'S ANSWER (1:8-10)

The Bridegroom answers the maiden's prayer (1:7) by giving her seven statements telling her where she can find Him and be fed by Him (1:8-11). He *affirms her* as beautiful in His eyes, and gives her a *threefold instruction* (1:8), a *threefold affirmation* (1:9-10). His seven statements in this passage represent a vital part of the theology of holy passion.

1. Jesus **woos her heart** by saying*, "O most beautiful of women."*

If you do not know, O fairest among women . . . (Song 1:8a)

He sees her as the most beautiful one, even though she is still immature and at the beginning of her journey. Jesus knows who we will be at the end of the journey, and relates to us on that basis, even at the beginning. She is unlovely to the angry sons, but is most beautiful to Him, even in the midst of her failure. The first issue in understanding how the Lord feeds the heart of His people starts with understanding how He sees us in our weakness.

2. Jesus gives a **threefold instruction** as to where He feeds her and establishes intimacy with her (1:8).He emphasises the importance of not living *in isolation*, *idleness*, or with an *independent spirit.*

Follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents. (Song 1:8)

a) Jesus instructs the Bride to follow the path of those who have gone before

. . . follow in the footsteps of the flock. (Song 1:8b)

The Shulamite is learning to hear His voice, and as she listens for His voice, she will hear His words coming through those who love Him. He tells her to follow in the footsteps of the flock, to get involved in the fellowship of the Body. The footsteps of the flock speak of where all the sheep walk with God. He was saying follow in the place where the Body walks, or get back into fellowship and do not overreact to the angry brothers who judged and mistreated you. People isolate themselves from the Body as a result of feeling rejection, bitterness, or shame related to the Church

Jesus prophesied that He would build His Church (Mt. 16:18). He is returning for a connected Church filled with glory. Much is lost in our spiritual life (and in our children) if we forsake assembling together and instead embrace a "churchless Christianity."

18"I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail…" (Mt. 16:18)

25…not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another… (Heb. 10:25)

b) She is also encouraged to influence those around her in the context of relationship with true spiritual leaders

. . . and feed your little goats (Song 1:8c)

Scripture emphasises the importance of serving and not living in idleness. Each of us has a sphere of influence for which we are accountable. As we share what we are learning, and accept accountability for those around us, we will be drawn into greater measures of maturity.

16"… the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body… (Eph. 4:16)

c) Thirdly, she is encouraged to honour spiritual authority, not living in a spirit of independence that disregards it.

beside the shepherds' tents. (Song 1:8d)

Jesus wants us to have a humble heart toward the shepherds (leaders) under whom He places us.

Summary: The Bridegroom's answer touches three common temptations. First is the temptation to isolation or bitterness by feeling mistreated by the angry sons or shame related to our sin. Second is the temptation to selfishness that allows us to idly use all our free time on ourselves. Jesus wants us to take care of the little ones. Third is the temptation to live with an independent spirit that resists spiritual authority and walks in lawlessness and pride.

3. The Bridegroom gives a **threefold affirmation** of her beauty and sincere desire to obey. He speaks affectionately, calling her "My love" and affirming her as "lovely," beautiful, in His eyes (1:9).

Song 1:9-10: [9]I have compared you, My love, to My filly among Pharaoh's chariots. [10]Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold.

She is His darling, and He has always seen her as this. His evaluation is not based on what she has achieved, but on His eternal perspective, and on how she has set her heart to seek after Him.

a) **to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots**. In the value system of the day, only the best of the best would be "among Pharaoh's chariots." The horses that pulled his personal chariot were the most obedient and strongest horses on earth. The Shulamite is singled out as being the King's choice for partnership in His Kingdom agenda.

b) **Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments** . . . The cheeks speak of the emotions that are revealed in the course of life. He sees her emotions as beautiful and tender towards Him, adorned with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He sees our sincere devotion even in our weakness.

c) **Your neck with chains of gold** . . . The neck symbolises the human will, turning the head in the way that it will go. Scripture speaks of those who are stiff-necked, which means they are stubborn or rebellious. The neck speaks of godly submission. In time of war, a conquering king put his foot on a defeated king's neck to show his submission. The King affirms that her will has been focused on the "one thing."

The chains of gold bear the king's emblem and speak of royal authority. A chain of gold with the king's emblem on it was worn by the prince as he walked through the town.

Our Bridegroom sees our submission to His authority, and our resolve to obey Him even in our weakness.

F. JESUS SPEAKS THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST THAT HE WILL COMPLETE THE WORK IN HER (1:11)

Song of Solomon 1:11: We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver.

The Daughters of Jerusalem speak here as representatives of the voice of the King. This is the Body of Christ in their role as cooperating with Jesus to bring the Bride to maturity and beauty. The goal of our corporate activity is to present one another as beautiful adornments to Jesus.

Colossians 1:28: Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.