Session 9 – The Fellowship of Suffering – Songs 5:2-9

REVIEW

At the end of chapter 4 we saw the Bride pray for both the north winds of adversity and the south winds of blessing to come to the garden of her heart so that the spices of worship and adoration might flow from her and see His glory released in her so that others will meet this One whom she loves..

[16]Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let My Beloved come to His garden and eat its pleasant fruits. (Song 4:16)

This is the turning point of the song. The garden has now become *His garden*. It is no longer hers, and she no longer lives for herself. She is now concerned for one thing – *to live in such a way that Jesus will receive maximum pleasure from her life.*

In Songs 1-4 our focus was on God's people as the Bride receiving *her inheritance in God*. In Song 5-8 the focus is on God as the Bridegroom receiving *His inheritance in His people.*

[18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, (Eph. 1:18)

The garden of the Bride's heart becomes His garden, as she sees her life as His rather than her own.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Shulamite has now come to the crucial stage in her journey to intimacy and authority. Although all the steps along the way have been necessary and important, it is here in this section that she faces the great crisis of her life. Her love will be proven, demonstrated in the crucible of testing. Her destiny awaits her on the other side of this test in which many questions must be answered – will she follow through on her commitments made in the revelation of the King's love? Will she embrace the dark night of suffering with an unoffended heart? Will she emerge from this test as one who is lovesick, or will she become offended and bitter? Her destiny rests in the balance, and only time will tell the full story of her victory.

At the beginning of chapter 5 we see the King reveal Himself to the Bride as the Jesus of Gethsemane (5:2), and ask her to open her heart to Him to experience new dimensions of intimacy in the fellowship of His sufferings.

[10]… that I may know Him…and the fellowship of His sufferings… (Phil. 3:10)

Although we are to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, there are several wrong ways in which God's people approach suffering. Some receive all the suffering that comes, even when it is an attack of the enemy that should be resisted. The New Testament mainly refers to suffering as persecution for Jesus' sake.

The Bride responds in obedience (5:3-5), which is followed by a twofold test. First the King tests her by withdrawing the sense of His presence (5:6); then He allows the spiritual authorities to mistreat her and take her ministry away (5:7)

B. THE SHULAMITE IS INVITED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS' SUFFERINGS

Songs 5:2 I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

1. The Bride is in a place of spiritual rest and awakened love. A.W. Tozer calls this "the paradox of love," as we have found God and yet still yearn to pursue Him. The Shulamite has come to trust in the perfect love and sovereign power of the King, and yet she yearns for more. Her heart is awake with desire, yet there is no anxiety. He will be faithful to her throughout the journey that is ahead.

2. She hears the voice of the Beloved inviting her into yet another encounter with Him. She knows His voice, for she has developed keen hearing in the place of intimate communion with Him. It is essential for her to know that He is the one calling her, because the test she is about to face will be difficult. She needs the confidence that her Beloved is going before her to prepare the way.

3. Jesus knocks on the door of our hearts to invite us onward to the deepest places of intimacy and authority. There is always the exercise of the Shulamite's will that is involved, for the King desires voluntary love and response at every step of the journey. He will not force His way.

4. His words of affirmation empower her decision to follow. She remembers that with His words comes grace, the power to respond in the situation that faces her. Jesus will never call us into a step of obedience, and then neglect to give us the power to obey. When His voice comes, the power is made available, and the only issue that remains is our willingness to respond.

   The King makes four statements of affirmation that establish her again in the confidence of his love for her:

   a. ***My sister*** – Jesus has fully identified with us in our human dependency on the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a faithful and sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 2:16-18).

   b. ***My love*** – she is the focus of His affections, and desires that she respond out of love and not fear or coercion. Jesus is a lover, not a taskmaster.

   c. ***My dove*** – the King declares His assessment of her innocence and devotion, His knowledge that she has fixed her gaze upon Him. His statement draws her upward into full obedience.

   d. ***My perfect one*** – He sees perfection in her that now must be demonstrated in the crucible of testing. Even as Jesus was exhibited as perfect through the fiery test of suffering, now the Bride will be revealed through the same process. This is the only reasonable answer for the deep question of why God permits difficulty in the lives of His beloved ones. It centres on the matter of demonstrated qualification to stand in intimacy and authority as joint-heirs with Christ.

5. Jesus invites the Bride to share in the dark night of suffering:

   for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night

Jesus now reminds the Bride of the depths to which He went because of love. He comes to her in the middle of the night with dew on His head, His locks wet with the drops of the night. This is a picture of Jesus in Gethsemane as He struggled all night in prayer. He was facing the agony of His trial, becoming the "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He is now calling His beloved to join Him in the fellowship of His sufferings, to embrace her cross even as He embraced His, and to trust the Father's love in the face of confusing and frightening situations. She will be sustained by the knowledge that He went before her, that what is now facing her is under His banner of love.

It is essential to see that there is now no compromise in her. The difficulty she will face now is not a result of compromise but of full obedience.

Phil. 3:10 …that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

C. THE BRIDE'S RESPONSE OF FULL OBEDIENCE AND TRUST

[3] I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them? [4] My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me.[5] I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.

1. As she hears the Bridegroom's words, she is aware that the moment of costly obedience is upon her. She recalls that the last time she was summoned to obedience, she was dressed in the clothing of compromise and fear. She declares that she has removed those old clothes, that her feet have been washed and cleansed by the Bridegroom's love, and therefore she cannot dress herself in compromise again. Though she feels trepidation at the summons, she is now determined to follow with courage and trust.

2. The Shulamite's heart is quickened with yearning as the King touches the latch on the door of her heart. She is stricken with longing as she remembers the price He paid for her. She is longing to be with Him, to know the joy of full revelation and partnership with Him, and so she arises to open the door, to say "yes" to the call to discipleship. God has placed longings in us that only He can satisfy and as we feel His invitation, as He places His hand on the door of our hearts so it awakens those longings deep within us and we yearn for more of Him and there's always more!!!

3. As she does so, her hands begin to drip with myrrh, her fingers with liquid myrrh as she touches the door to open it. This is a picture of the anointing that comes in the moment of obedience, the grace of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus in 100 percent abandonment to His will. It is important for us to see this principle, that the power to endure the journey comes as we step forward to obey. Until that moment, the power is not needed.

D. THE KING'S SURPRISING STRATEGY – THE TEST OF WITHDRAWAL

Songs 5:6 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

This section of the story is so important to our understanding of the ways of God, the means by which He fulfills His promise to bring us into full intimacy and partnership with Jesus. If we do not comprehend His strategies, we can misinterpret what is happening to us, succumb to confusion and bitterness, and miss the very opportunity God has presented to us to usher us into His promises. The confusion that follows can lead us on a detour from which it can take years to recover.

1. ***I opened for my Beloved, but my Beloved had turned away and was gone***. The Shulamite opened the door of her heart with eager anticipation of intimate communion with the King, only to find that once again He has withdrawn His presence from her. She remembers His previous withdrawal, and understands that His strategy is to draw her deeper into His will and purpose. His banner over her is love, and this, too, is part of that promise.

2. ***My soul failed me when he spoke.*** This phrase carries a double meaning that emphasizes the shock of the King's withdrawal. There is the sense of eager anticipation at seeing the Beloved, but then also the deflation, the sinking feeling at the realization that He has gone. In this moment she makes the decision to pursue Him into the night, to seek Him until she finds Him.

    a. It is essential to remember that what will follow is not due to any disobedience or compromise on her part. This dark night is bathed in obedience, and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit for her qualification as the Bride, the one who will become the suitable helper for the Son of God.

    b. The tactic of strategic withdrawal seems strange to us until we comprehend the ways of God. This is the Father's means of bringing His sons and daughters into their full authority and power; He has done it with all His favourites through the centuries, with Jesus being the ultimate example. The brilliant Christian writer C.S. Lewis gives a wonderful perspective in his book *"The Screwtape Letters" (Harper Collins edition, 2001, p. 40)*:

He will set them off with communications of His presence which, though faint, seem great to them, with emotional sweetness, and easy conquest over temptation. But He never allows this state of affairs to last long. Sooner or later He withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs – to carry out from the will alone duties that have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. Hence, the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him most.

He wants them to learn to walk, and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger that when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.

3. ***I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.*** The Bride fervently looks for the Lord but she cannot find Him. Her pain becomes more and more evident as she continues to seek Him and call Him with no effect.

Seeking and praying will not shorten this dark night – she must experience all of what He has to teach her. Spiritual warfare will not remove this difficulty because it is initiated by God, not by the devil, and is not caused by sin or compromise. The Holy Spirit is bringing her into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, to become fully yoked with Him in intimacy and authority.

During this dark night, the Holy Spirit exposes strongholds of the enemy that remain in our lives. We will be tempted to comfort ourselves, to solve our own situations, to doubt God's love and power. Our confession is to be constant: *"His banner over me is love; therefore, Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit."*

E. THE KING'S SURPRISING STRATEGY (PART 2) – THE TEST OF PERSECUTION

Songs 5:7 The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls.

1. The Shulamite encounters the watchmen, who are the spiritual leaders of the city (the Body of Christ). In past encounters, they have been her instructors (1:7-8), and she has sought their counsel (3:3). These are the ones who have been given spiritual oversight in our lives, and are in a position of honour and respect.

2. In this encounter, the watchmen turn on the Shulamite, and treat her in a completely unexpected and undeserved way. They find her, they strike her, and they wound her. Although she is in passionate pursuit of Jesus, she experiences rejection and persecution from those who should be in support of her.

3. These wounds are especially painful because they come through those we have trusted, with whom we have had relationship. Misunderstanding, mistreatment – even betrayal – by those we trust is a most painful test. *Why is this happening?*

4. The Holy Spirit addresses a fundamental stronghold in each of our lives – the desire for the approval of men. Will we follow the Lamb wherever He goes, or give in to human agenda? Remember, this is not rebellion against authority, but obedience to the voice of Jesus. God strategically hides His purposes from others around us, to see if we will follow His voice alone. Consider the following examples:

    a. Joseph, in Genesis 37-45. In order to ascend to his place of authority, Joseph was required to remain faithful through years in which the promise of God tested him (Psalm 105:19). This is a clear prophetic picture of Jesus and the salvation of Israel.

    b. Elisha, in 2 Kings 2. Elisha had an awareness of his inheritance, but had to resist the opinions of Elijah in order to receive it.

    c. Jesus, in Matthew 14. The ultimate example is Jesus, who constantly had to resist the opinions of those around Him in order to obey the Father and come into His full inheritance.

God is also dealing with the hearts of the leaders, to expose any spirit of control, pride, or jealousy that may be in them. This is not our concern; it is between God and the leaders.

5. The surprising pinnacle of this encounter is the tearing away of the veil from the Shulamite. This veil was her covering, her protection, but it was also the remains of what kept her separate from the Beloved. Remember her cry of longing in Chapter 1:7 – *"Why should I be as one who veils herself …?"*

   She is exposed and vulnerable, left hanging before the eyes of men, experiencing ridicule and scorn, precisely because of obedience to the Bridegroom's call. In this, she is experiencing the communion of Christ's sufferings, for His rejection, crucifixion, and death was also the tearing of the veil.

   Heb.10: 19-20** [19] **Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

   The Shulamite is experiencing the tearing of her flesh in this encounter. The Holy Spirit uses this devastating situation to answer the cry of her heart! If she will respond with humility and grace, with an unoffended and lovesick heart, the veil of separation will be removed, and she will see the King in all His beauty.

6. In these dark night situations, the issue is whether we will respond with an unoffended and lovesick heart, or whether we will be offended and heartsick. Only by understanding and embracing the strategies of God can we come into the fullness that we desire.

F. THE BRIDE'S RESPONSE TO THE TEST

Songs 5: 8,9 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love.** [9] **What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

1. By her response, the Bride reveals that she has passed the test, and has emerged from this dark night with an unoffended and lovesick heart. Though she has not yet found Him, in humility she turns to the daughters of Jerusalem to ask for their assistance. Pride is not an issue for her now; all she cares about is finding Jesus and clinging to Him.

2. The daughters of Jerusalem respond to the Shulamite with wonder and amazement. How can she speak like this after what she has been through? The daughters look at the Bride's situation, and are struck with wonder at the King's beauty. Who is He, that she would respond like this to her own difficult situation? The daughters declare that the Shulamite is "the fairest among women." Her dark night encounter has produced a quality of glory about her that is obvious and undeniable.

   2 Corinthians 4:17–18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,** [18] **while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

3. The Shulamite has fixed her gaze on eternal things, on the beauty of Jesus and His purposes in her life. That fixed gaze has given her the strength to endure the process that qualifies her to stand in intimacy and authority with him in His coming Kingdom.

   What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?

4. In the next section of the Song, the Shulamite will give answer to this question as she shares the revelation of the One who is the Fairest of Ten Thousand.