

The Sluggish Saint and the Seeking Saviour

Song of Solomon 5:2-4

17 October 2021

11:00 AM (Halifax); 3:00 PM (Glenholme & Livestream)

Introduction:

Today, we are returning to our sermon series from the Song of Solomon.

- It has been a long time, so we will need a little review.

Let me begin by reminding you what the Song of Solomon is all about.

- It is an allegory about the relationship of Jesus Christ with His church.
- It presents Him as a bridegroom and we (the church) as His bride.
 - It is a very encouraging book because (in a way that no other book in the Bible does) it tells us about His ardent love for us and our responsive love for Him.
 - It shows us how He delights in us and in our love for Him; and how He yearns for intimacy with us—as it says in Isaiah Isa 62:5: **As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.**

The Scripture takes up this analogy of Christ as our Bridegroom quite often.

- When John the Baptist presented Jesus, he spoke of Christ as the Bridegroom who has come to take the church as His wife, to redeem her by His blood and sanctify her with His Holy Spirit. John said that he, John, was the friend of the Bridegroom—the best man.
- In Ephesians 5, Paul explains when writing about marriage, that he speaks of Christ and the church in a mystery. From the beginning marriage has been a picture of the relationship of Christ to His people, and now Christ has been fully revealed.
- At the end of Revelation, it speaks of the church on the last day as a bride adorned for her husband who is presented to Him in all the glory that He has bestowed on her that she might dwell with Him in His Father's house forever.

Many modern commentators are squeamish about speaking of the intense affection of Christ for us with the allegory of marriage, especially because of the intimacy of the marriage bed that is often tastefully spoken of in the Song of Solomon,

- It seems too much, too strong. But we need to see that there is no better analogy than this to express the deep affection of Jesus Christ for His people.
 - Interestingly, the bride, as spoken of in this song, is one bride, yet she is made up of many members. We actually see one member encouraging the others to love and enjoy their Lord and husband together.
 - That is one of the many things that shows that this is not about an ordinary marriage.
- Even the ancient Jews (before Christ came) largely understood it to speak of Him who was to come. Most of the early and medieval church fathers and pretty much all of the Reformers and puritans understood it with delight in this way.
 - It has only been in modern times that exegetes have sought to abolish the allegory and find in it nothing more than a love poem celebrating marriage or sometimes, among unbelieving scholars, celebrating illicit romance.

- While there is much to learn about marriage in this song, there is much more to learn about the precious relationship we have with Christ.

As we have progressed through this Song, we have seen how it speaks of the many different experiences that we have with Christ as His bride.

- We have seen her at one time yearning for His kisses, and at another time beside herself with the lavish outpouring of His affection for her.
- We have seen her ashamed of her shortcomings before Him in one instance and joyfully presenting her fruit for Him to enjoy in another.
- We have seen Him leaping over the mountains like a gazelle to come to her, and we have seen her bemoaning His absence—as she did at the beginning of chapter 3 and as we will read of her doing here in chapter 5.
 - We are reminded that a living relationship with Christ is not static.
 - Like our marriages, it is something we need to pursue, maintain, and watch over with care.

When we left off at chapter 5, verse 1, Christ had been telling His bride how enraptured He was with her, praising her and enjoying her fruits as most precious to Him.

- In 4:9, He spoke of being ravished with her love—with even one look of love from her.
 - Indeed, if we have any true love for Christ, it is a marvellous thing because it is the result of His gracious redeeming work and it will grow up into perfection.
 - Yes, if you are believer, even though you may feel that your fruit has much to be desired, He takes great delight that it is there at all. It is proof that you are His.
- In 4:16, we saw how she was thrilled to have Him enjoying her and wanted her spices to flow out to Him for His enjoyment to which He responded that He was indeed already tasting of her fruit with great delight and sharing it with His friends.
 - She was thrilled to be always His.
 - She could not fathom then how she could ever tire of pouring herself out for Him.

But in chapter 5 verse 2 (where we pick up today), we see that something has happened to her ardent affection.

- Her warm affection has cooled down and she knows it.
 - She describes her condition and then as the text unfolds, she tells of how He came to restore her and of all that transpired from that.
 - It won't be possible for us to get to all of that today.
- We will only cover verses 2-4.
 - Nevertheless, I will read to 6:3 to give you the whole context.

Here is God's word, beginning in Song of Solomon 5:2 – 6:3:

Song of Solomon 5:2- 6:3: I sleep, but my heart is awake; *it is* the voice of my beloved! He knocks, *saying*, “Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.” ³ I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on *again*? I have

washed my feet; how can I defile them? ⁴ My beloved put his hand by the latch *of the door*, and my heart yearned for him. ⁵ I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped *with myrrh*, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. ⁶ I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had

turned away *and* was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. ⁷ The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me. ⁸ I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I *am* lovesick! ⁹ What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, O fairest among women? What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, that you so charge us? ¹⁰ My beloved *is* white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head *is like* the finest gold; his locks *are wavy, and* black as a raven. ¹² His eyes *are like* doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set. ¹³ His

cheeks *are* like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips *are* lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. ¹⁴ His hands *are* rods of gold set with beryl. His body *is* carved ivory inlaid *with* sapphires. ¹⁵ His legs *are* pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance *is* like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. ¹⁶ His mouth *is* most sweet, yes, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem! ^{6:1} Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you? ² My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed *his flock* in the gardens, and to gather lilies. ³ I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine. He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.

May the Lord bless the reading and the preaching of His holy and infallible word.

You see at the opening of our reading, chapter 5, verse 2, how the bride describes her current spiritual state.

- She says:

I. "I sleep, but my heart is awake."

A. She is aware that her affection for Jesus her husband has cooled off.

1. She has grown drowsy and sluggish.

- She is sleeping in that she is no longer pursuing Him, no longer delighting in Him, no longer yearning for Him, no longer pouring out her affection for Him.
- She is no longer very moved by what the book of Hebrews describes as its main theme—that He is better.
 - Better than the angels, better than any priest, better than Moses, better than any other sacrifice for sin,
 - He provides a better salvation with better promises, a better inheritance, a better rest, a better way to God.
 - He is a better provider, a better saviour, a better comforter, a better encourager, a better worship leader, a better king, a better teacher, a better admonisher, a better example, a better helper, a better lover.
- But now she yawns when she thinks of Him.

2. How she is changed from the one who said,

- "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth."
- Who said with her friends, "We will run after you."
- Who spoke of how His love was "better than wine."
- Who delighted to sit under Him as under her apple tree and whose fruit was sweet to her taste.

- Who lay awake listening for Him to come and delighted when she heard Him coming like a stag, leaping across the mountains to see her.
 - No longer does she ask the wind to blow upon her upon her garden that her spices may flow out for Him, that He might come and enjoy her, as she had said at the end of chapter 4—just two verses ago.
- All that has changed.
3. Surely, when she said it, she meant it.
- She couldn't imagine that it could possibly change—
 - Surely she would be enraptured with Him forever.
 - But alas, she sleeps.
- B. But she also recognises that things could be a lot worse... though she sleeps, at least her heart is still awake.
1. She still loves Him.
- She has not rejected Him.
 - She had not turned to another husband—to idols.
 - She knows that she does not want a different husband.
 - She has no intention of leaving Him or anything like that.
2. She is not even angry with Him—she still has a lot of appreciation for Him and knows that all she has said in praise of Him before is true...
- She still wants to follow Him and live in His house...
 - She has not become a drunkard or seductress, or turned to pornography.
 - She does not curse Him or break the Sabbath... nothing like that.
 - She has not rejected His statutes and commandments.
 - She is still willing to talk to Him and to listen to Him...
 - She does the basics—she goes to church, she says her prayers, she reads His word, she gives her tithes, she cares for His children.
 - She is not so far gone that she has abandoned the basics—but the enthusiasm for Him is gone... her zeal... she no longer pours herself out for Him.
 - Her heart is awake—she has not forgotten Him—
 - She has just grown tired and sluggish in her relationship with Him.
 - She no longer yearns to be with Him and to have close communion with Him.
3. These are times in our relationship with Jesus that He identified and described when He said (Mk 14:38), “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”
- Do you remember when He said that?
 - It was right after His disciples had told Him that they would never forsake Him and had gone to the garden of Gethsemane to pray.
 - Jesus urged them to pray, but they kept sleeping... they were not against Him, but they were weak in their zeal and devotion to Him.
 - We all have our flesh, not just our bodies, but our remaining corruption, our sin.
 - In Galatians 5, Paul says: **“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”**

- In Romans 7:18-19, he speaks of this struggle within himself. He says: **For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.**
- His spiritual heart is not dead—it is still for God—but he finds that he is sleeping.

TRANS> The bride of Christ knows such times.

- If you are a member of the bride (the believing church), ***you*** know such times.

II. **But look! See how our gracious husband comes to arouse us.**

A. She knows Him. She says, “The voice of my beloved!”

1. It is an exclamation. It is not a sentence.
 - The words “it is” are in italics to show that they are not in the original.
 - She identifies His voice as the voice that has broken in upon her sleep.
 - The previous phrase can even be translated “I sleeping, my heart waking.”
 - Some say it can be ingressive “I was sleeping when my heart was awakened,” or perhaps the meaning could even be, “I was about to fall asleep when I was suddenly awakened.”
 - But whatever the case, His voice has broken through, just as Jesus’ voice broke through upon His disciples when they were sleeping in Gethsemane.
2. As a believer, you know such times.
 - You have become spiritually sluggish, but then you hear His call and it gets your attention.
 - The exact phrase was used in chapter 2, verse 8, “The voice of my beloved,” only there is a contrast.
 - In 2:8, His voice was heard with delight—here is it more of an interruption.
 - You were quite comfortable in you sleep and now you have been disturbed.
 - More about that later.

B. See His passionate appeal to us as His sleeping wife.

1. First it says (still verse 2), **He knocks, saying “Open for me.”**
 - a. The word knock is a strong word—I mean that it speaks of a strong sort of knocking—it is a knocking that speaks to us and says, “Open for me.”
 - b. It is quite clear what He wants.
 - He wants us to open up and let Him come in.
 - We have shut Him out.
 - He wants to be intimate with us, but we have closed and locked the door to our heart.
 - He wants us to be the way we were when our heart leapt with joy and enthusiasm to hear Him coming—when we freely gave ourselves fully to Him, wanting Him to taste of our fruit.
 - He will not tolerate this distance between us and Him, this shutting out.
 - It is not the way we ought to be with Him as our husband.

2. See how He nevertheless addresses her with sweetness.
 - a. He says, “Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.”
 - He does not chastise us—“my frigid one, my irritating one, my ungrateful one.”
 - No, the Lord of glory addresses us, through the closed door that has wrongly shut Him out as “my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.”
 - These are all terms of endearment...
 - He the high king, calls us His sister—He is not ashamed to do so because He has redeemed us by His blood.
 - My love, the word we saw before that speaks her has a His companion or dear friend.
 - My dove, speaking of our devotion to Him alone as a chaste bride, His virgin, the one with eyes for Him alone.
 - My perfect one—the one who is blameless, who has nothing on our record against us.
 - b. Surely these terms should melt all the resistance that is in us.
 - We are sinners, yet He has taken us to be His beloved bride and He delights in us.
 - He found us in our blood, defiled, unclean, unloved, a stench to all who saw us, and He took us in, washed us, redeemed us, and made us whole.
 - And now He speaks to us as His sister, His love, His dove, His perfect one.
 - Surely the love of Christ constrains us to live up to these titles—to open to Him and to let Him come in!
 - To think that the Lord of glory, the King of Kings has chosen us to be His bride and that He wants to be with us!
 - Not only is His appeal a direct appeal (open to me) and a sweet appeal (my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one),
3. It is also a passionate appeal.
 - He describes Himself as out in the weather.
 - He says “Open to Me...for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.”
 - The dews in Israel are very heavy at night—like being out in the rain.
 - When King Nebuchadnezzar was turned into a beast, he was said to be wet with the dews of heaven—he was out in the weather, in the cold.
 - The Lord of glory is telling us that as long as we keep Him shut out, it is as though He is in the cold night air.
 - What condescension for the LORD of glory to speak this way, but this is the way He speaks because He loves us.
 - And it is true of Him. Is it not?
 - Think of what He did that He might have us.

- He redeemed us from Satan who had us in bondage. He came with His mighty sword to rescue us from the dragon that He might bring us home with Him.
- He also purchased us—at the highest price—from the debt that we owed to His Father—He had to shed His precious blood which is more precious than gold or silver or costly stones that perish. Such a bride price has never been paid.
- He also had to transform us out of our corruption that we might turn to what is right and true instead of to what is false and defiled, and even now, He must continue to teach us to love what is good and to hate what is evil.
- No husband ever did so much for his wife.
 - No husband ever went to such great lengths to obtain her.
 - And this husband with this love is here shut out in the cold.
 - How it pains Him to be shut out.
 - Did He not say of His people when He was here: **Mt 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!**
 - Keep in mind that to take someone under your wings is a common idiom in the Bible for taking them in holy matrimony.
 - Think of Boaz who took Ruth under his wing.

TRANS> What a clear, sweet, passionate appeal our Lord makes to us, His church, when we have fallen into spiritual slumbers.

- Surely it calls for a warm response. Surely it will awaken us. But alas,

III. See how we coldly continue to refuse to open to Jesus our gracious husband.

- We rebuff Him. We leave Him out in the cold. We make excuses.
- We are frigid—so disrespectful, so cold to this One who is so warm.

A. Let's look at our objections

- There are two of them, both in verse 3.
 1. The first one is this: **I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on *again*?**
 - The word translated *robe* here refers to dress clothes.
 - If we take this in a most literal fashion, we are saying that we have to get dressed up just to open the door and let Him come in.
 - Surely we could put on a night gown or wrap ourself in a tunic; that would be easy enough.
 - But I think we should get into the allegory a little more.
 - We are talking about opening up to Him, about being intimate with Him and letting Him come in.
 - That requires us to rouse ourselves from our sleep and prepare for Him.

- We have to warm ourselves up to Him, to consider Him and our love for Him and we have to clothe ourselves with the righteousness He gives us.
- Yes, we have to dress ourselves. There is indeed some preparation.
 - We can't just lie there half asleep.
 - We have to look at who He is, His grace, His kindness, His glory, His beauty, His saving work, His sacrifice for us—to be intimate with Him, we have to warm up to Him.
 - That is how we get ready to receive Him.
 - That is how we dress ourselves for intimacy and communion with Him.
- It does indeed require some effort. It does require us to wake up.
 - It's not pleasant to our sinful flesh to truly go to Him.
 - We'd rather keep a comfortable distance and talk to Him on the other side of the door.
 - However, this is not so hard when He is the one who clothes us with His own righteousness and fits us out with grace for communion with Him.

2. The second objection is this: **I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?**

- On the face of it, we are saying that we don't want to get out of bed because we'd have to wash our feet again
 - As you know, people in this region and time would wash their feet because of the dusty roads they walked on, but do we really need to wash them if we just get up to open the door?
 - This is a very ridiculous objection in the literal sense—and I think it is meant to be.
- But again, the sense of the allegory is having intimacy with Him.
 - We are clever enough to know that if we are going to open up and be intimate with Christ, we are going to be exposed.
 - We are going to have to deal with some sin that we have not dealt with while we have been spiritually sleeping—and we don't want to do that.
 - This is referred to here as washing our feet—the same way Jesus used it when He told His disciples that they had already had the ultimate washing at their conversion, but now needed only to wash their feet.
 - That is, to deal with the sins they had committed.
 - We object here that we have already washed our feet—we have already confessed our sins and gone to bed and we don't want to do it again.
 - We have done it, you see, in our own superficial way, but Jesus is calling us to do it in a genuine way.
 - Saying our formal prayers was enough for us, but He wants something more.
 - He wants us to truly open ourselves for Him to come in.

B. How disrespectful this response is to His advances!

1. It is disrespectful because we are suggesting that His request for intimacy is unreasonable.

- We are asking these questions—“How can I do this? How can I do that? You are asking me to what is unreasonable.”
 - It is true that husbands can be selfish and demanding in their advances toward their wives.
 - But not so with Jesus Christ!
 - His requests for intimacy are never unreasonable.
 - And it is very wrong for us to speak to Him as if they are.
 - An outright refusal would be better than trying to shift the blame to Him—as if the problem is that He has asked too much of us!
 - We can sound so convincing when we talk like this.
 - “How can I take put on my robe again? How can I wash my feet again?”
 - It sounds so convincing to us, but in fact our excuses are frivolous.
 - We need to stop pretending that they are not.
 - You need to get up and let Him come in.
 - You need to warm yourself up for Him and you need to confess those sins that you are clinging to.
 - Arise sleeper, and let Him come in!
2. This is disrespectful because essentially you are telling Him that He is not worth the trouble of putting yourself out.
- You are saying that He is unworthy of your love, of getting dressed, of cleaning yourself up for Him.
 - You have lost sight of His glory. You have forgotten how gracious He is, how gentle, how full of love, how good His fruit is to your taste, how sweet it is to sit at His feet and learn of Him.
 - If you saw clearly like you did in the past, you would consider it a delight and a privilege to dress for Him and to wash for Him.
 - If you love someone, you are eager to put yourself out for them.
3. This is disrespectful because you act as if it will harm you to go to Him—to warm to Him, to put on the righteous garments He gave you, to confess and forsake your sin.
- This you say to the one who gave Himself for you to free you from Satan, to atone for your sin with His precious blood, and to transform you by His Spirit.
 - He did that when you first came to Him.
 - He did not harm you. He set you free and gave you eternal life in His house.
 - It is so wrong for you to act like it will harm you to come to Him now.
 - All it will harm is your sinful flesh, your selfish pride, your blindness and your ignorance, all that is corrupt and defiled in you.
 - It will do you much, much good to open to Him.
 - By avoiding Him, you are in fact denying yourself of happiness, blessing, purity, hope, joy, holiness, security, maturity, learning...

TRANS> This is what you do if left to yourself, even when you hear His voice, and know that it is indeed His voice...

- You lie in bed slumbering. You refuse arise and open yourself to Him. You refuse to put yourself out for Him.

- Left to ourselves, we would never wake up.
- But we are not let to ourselves.

IV. Our faithful husband refuses to leave us sleeping. See how He wakes us up!

A. He reaches forth to us with His hand of power.

- Verse 4 begins: **My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door.**
- 1. Remember that in the allegory, the bride is the one who is closed—it is the door to intimacy with her that he is asking her to open so He can come in.
 - So now He reaches forth His hand and either puts it by the latch, or through a hole beside the door. The word translated ‘latch’ is literally the hole; it is used eight other times and translated hole or cave.
- 2. Whenever the Bible speaks of the Lord’s hand or arm or finger, it speaks of His almighty power.
 - When Moses did signs before Pharaoh, the magicians tried to imitate them, but there came a point when they declared, “This is the finger of God.”
 - It is the arm of the Lord that destroys enemies and that rescues His people.
 - Isaiah asks, “to whom the arm of the Lord been revealed?” in parallel with the question “Who has believed our report?”
 - It is His hand that reaches to us to open our hearts to Him.
 - It is a most powerful work of divine sovereign grace.
 - As Psalm 110 says, His people are made willing in the day of His power.
 - They become offerings to Him, not by force, but by willingness.

B. And you see that this is the result when the Lord reaches forth His hand to us when we are all shut up to Him.

- Verse 4 says: **“My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him.”**
- 1. She was so stubborn that she would never have come, but now He has put forth His hand to her and she is yearning for Him.
 - Verse 5 goes on to tell us that she arose to open for Him and verse 6 that she did open for Him.
 - We will look at this next week.
- 2. But for now I want you to see that our Lord does not leave us sleeping if we are His.
 - We may resist His call for a time—perhaps a long time—but eventually, He will reach forth His hand and we will respond.
 - We will willingly give ourselves to Him as a free offering.
 - We will open up for Him to come in.
 - It is His grace that awakens us.
- 3. How good it is when we finally open ourselves to Him so He can come in.
 - So that we can freely give ourselves over to Him, so that we can pour our lives out wholly for Him.
 - All the glory goes to Him.
 - So what about you today?

- Have you opened to Him?
- Has the power of His gracious hand done its sovereign work?