

The Fairest Among Women

Song of Solomon 5:8 – 6:3

31 October 2021

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

Introduction:

Today we are continuing our sermon series in the Song of Solomon.

- I remind you that though there are different views of the Song of Solomon, we are looking at it in the way that the great majority of Bible-believing Jews and Christians (until the last century and a half) have understood it—
 - As an allegory that beautifully sets forth the relationship that Christ, the bridegroom, has with His church, the bride.
 - As such, we understand the bride to be one bride composed of many members.
 - So, for example, in today's sermon which is entitled "The Fairest Among Women," (from chapter 5 verse 9 of the Song) the woman in view is the entire church which is referred to repeatedly in the Bible as the wife or the bride of Christ.
 - It is very marvellous to think that the Son of God became human flesh in order that He might redeem us and take us into His Father's house forever as His bride.
 - God the Father sent Him with this purpose, and He gave Him a great multitude of people that cannot be numbered from this sinful fallen world to redeem—that they might be His holy bride.
 - He went to the cross to pay for our sins and from the beginning He has been gathering us by sending His Spirit to us to transform us so that we will obey His call to repent (turn from our old way of rebellion against God) and come to Him to be our Lord and Saviour, to pardon us for sin and to be our dear husband forever.

Back in chapter 4 of the Song of Solomon, we saw how much He delights in us as His bride.

- The chapter begins with Him saying to us, "**Behold, you *are* fair, my love! Behold, you *are* fair!**" and it goes on and on in praise of us.
 - He describes her as a garden that brings forth precious fruit that causes Him great delight. The fruit is her love for Him along with all the other fruit that goes with that love.

But she describes this ugly scene beginning in chapter 5, verse 2, where she is half asleep.

- This is disturbingly familiar to us as the church of Jesus Christ—there are times when we have grown sluggish in our relationship with Him.
 - It is not that we want another husband, but that we are sluggish about devoting ourselves to worshipping Him, pleasing Him, being fruitful for Him.
 - We do not want to go to the trouble of being intimate with Him.
- The scene is of Him knocking at her door at night, excluded from the bride He dearly loves as one out in the night.

- Though He speaks to her most tenderly, she rebuffs Him... “How can you ask me to arise for you now when I am undressed and in bed?”
- But then, as we have seen, He reaches out to her, the way He does, with His powerful omnipotent hand and touches her beside her door (the door that she has shut against Him). This is in chapter 5 verse 4.
 - This is the powerful working of the Spirit by which He restores us when we have grown cold—it is His almighty transforming touch.
 - How she is changed!
 - As a believer, you know how this is—when He touches you with His grace and power.
 - Now her heart yearns for Him.
 - Now she rises from her bed to open for Him.
 - And she opens to Him (5:6) with delighted expectation.
- But He is gone! He has deserted her.
 - This is what we looked at last week.
 - She must learn, we the bride must learn, that we can’t just drop Him and take Him up again whenever we please—He is our Lord and husband.
 - We must feel the wrong of our cold repulsion of Him.
- Nevertheless, His touch has truly changed her!
 - She does not turn and go back to bed.
 - She eagerly searches for Him and calls for Him—now she is out in the night.
 - The watchmen of the city of God, the church, find her and they misunderstand her, seeing her separated from Him, and they chastise her and count her as a loose woman, taking away her veil, but this does not stop her from searching for Him.
- We left off with her pleading with the daughters of Jerusalem, which we have seen to be the ordinary members of the church, even perhaps the young disciples of the church.
 - In verse 8, she says: **“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I *am* lovesick!”**
 - Being lovesick is like being homesick.
 - She is sick because she is separated from the one that she loves.
 - It is obvious that she can’t go on—she refuses to go on—without Him.
 - His touch has delivered her from her sluggishness.

Today we pick up with the response of these daughters of Jerusalem which is recorded in verse 9. This is the only verse we will cover today.

- I will begin today’s scripture reading with chapter 5, verse 8, where she begs the daughters of Jerusalem to tell her beloved that she is lovesick... and I will read to 6:3.
 - Here is the holy Word of God. Receive it as such:

Song of Solomon 5:8 – 6:3: 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.

And there we end the reading of God's Word.

- I highlight our text—verse 9—the response of the daughters of Jerusalem to the bride's earnest request for prayer:
 - **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?**
 - At first you might think that they are asking this question in scorn—why do you make such a big deal about Him? How is He any different than any other lover?
 - But looking ahead we can see that they are not asking it that way—In chapter 6 verse 1, they tell her that they want to find Him too.
 - It is clear that the daughters of Jerusalem are admiring the bride's devotion.

I. The devotion of the church to Christ her Bridegroom is quite conspicuous!

A. The daughters of Jerusalem are struck by it.

- Keep in mind that they are simply the ordinary members of the church.
 - The saints within the congregation who are themselves part of the bride—this bride of Christ, which, though one bride, is made up of many members.
- 1. The daughters of Jerusalem have seen the bride's relentless pursuit of Christ.
 - They see how He aroused her from her sluggishness.
 - She who was reluctant to open to Him at first, has been touched by His all-powerful mighty hand so that her heart now yearns for Him.
 - They see the myrrh, the sweet aroma of her love for Him, dripping off her hands.
 - They see how she opened the door to Him, how she found that He had deserted her, but how she did not give up and go back to bed.
 - She went out into the night, seeking Him and calling out to Him—in other words, searching the word and crying out to Him in prayer to return to her.
 - They see how the watchmen of the city of God found her searching and chastened her for pushing Him away...
 - How they even took away her veil and did not recognise her sincerity.
 - They abused her—yet she was not in the least deterred. Instead, she was spurred on all the more to seek Him so that now she has come to them,
 - the daughters of Jerusalem, and solemnly charged them to tell Him that she is lovesick—sick from His absence.

- Nothing deters her—not His desertion, not the watchmen’s harsh treatment, not her pride that might have kept her from asking them to speak to Him in her behalf.
 - They realise that she is utterly devoted to her beloved and it moves them to ask her a question.
2. They ask her what makes Him so special.
 - They say, verse 9, **“What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women?”** and then they repeat it again: **“What is your beloved more than another beloved that you so charge us?”**
 - Repeating the question like that shows that they are struck with awe having seen such devotion in her.
 - A literal translation of the Hebrew is, “What is your beloved from a beloved.”
 - In other words, what makes Him stand out from all the rest?
 - Why are you so earnest in your quest to find Him?
 - If He has deserted you, why don’t you go back to bed?
- We will look at her answer next week—at how she tells of His surpassing excellence.
- B. Think of some of the ways that we see the church’s devotion to Christ her husband.
1. She is made up of those who, as Jesus taught, have left all to follow Him.
 - She is composed of those who realise that even if He at times disappoints, she has no other place to go.
 - For her, the true bride, leaving Him is not an option.
 - She is like Abraham, who left his homeland, or like Moses, who went into the wilderness with the people of God when he might have lived as a prince in Egypt, as the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter.
 2. We see the church in the world, sometimes severely persecuted, accepting the plundering of her goods for His sake, leaving father and mother, wife and husband and children for his sake.
 - We see her seeking Him in sickness and in health, in poverty and in prosperity, for better or for worse.
 - We see her in Job proclaiming that, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”
 3. We see her ardent in her worship through the ages, gathering each Lord’s Day for the holy convocation, the assembling together with the saints to sing praise to Him, to hear His word, to seek Him in prayer, to yield to Him with vows and attest to His truth with her confessions.
 - We see her faithfully giving of her wealth—her tithes and her offerings so that the church can continue from generation to generation.
 4. We see her obeying Him, even when it costs her everything, submitting to Him when it means prison or job loss.
 5. We see her proclaiming His excellence to the nations and to her members—with great efforts in preaching and teaching and writing of Him.

6. We see her purging His church of false sons when they are manifest and we see her welcoming the chief of sinners when he repents—all because it is pleasing to her husband.
- C. In all these ways, everyone sees how special Christ is to His bride, the church.
1. Her members mutually show one another His true worth, and they show the world His true worth even while the world mocks them.
 - Indeed, their devotion is never greater than He deserves—No, rather, it is always much less than He deserves.
 2. But still they honour Him and bring glory to His name in a world that is lost and dead in sin and that does not honour Him at all.
 - They emerge out of the rubble (He lifts them out by His divine power) to be His devoted bride, His true worshippers, His faithful, obedient servants.
 - She stands out in the world for her constant devotion.
 - Though her members waver, there is always a testimony of faithfulness, a remnant according to election, those within her who are truly devoted to Him.

II. It is her devotion to Him that makes her the loveliest woman of all.

- A. The daughters of Jerusalem recognise the surpassing beauty of the church.
1. In our text, verse 9, they address her as “the fairest among women.”
 - Because of her unrelenting devotion to Jesus, she is the most beautiful bride of all—she is truly the fairest one of all.
 - There are none who compare with her.
 2. It is interesting to remember that the daughters of Jerusalem are seeing the beauty of the church of which they are themselves a part.
 - This is not in a vain way.
 - They feel deeply how they come short of His glory, of giving Him what He deserves, and each member is painfully aware of their own shortcomings.
 - And each sees the failings of the church in their own age, but they also see that all who are devoted to Christ have a beauty that far surpasses the world.
 - With the psalmist they say, Ps 16:3: **As for the saints who *are* on the earth, “They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.”**
 - They compare them with the world and they say: **Psalm 16:4: Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten *after* another god; their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips.**
- B. The daughters of Jerusalem are right. The bride of Christ, the church, is indeed the fairest one of all.
1. Jesus Himself calls her the fairest among women.
 - Back in chapter 1, verse 8, he used this very title to describe her.
 - If He thinks His bride is the fairest among women, then indeed she is.
 - We have seen recently how highly He praises her.

- In 4:1, how He says “Behold, you are fair, my love, behold you are fair! You have dove’s eyes—” eyes only for Him.
 - We saw how He went on to explain how delighted He was with even one look of true devotion from her.
 - **4:9-10: You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. ¹⁰ How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse!**
 - He knows that even a tiny spark of true devotion in her is the result of His divine saving work for which He poured out His soul unto death.
 - He knows that that spark will, by His grace, grow into a lovely flame that will burn forever with ardent love for Him and His Father.
 - He declares His bride to be the fairest among women!
2. Indeed, nothing is more lovely than a woman who is wholly devoted to her husband.
- Unless jealousy and envy cloud our vision, a woman who ardently loves a worthy man, who finds her joy in serving him, is lovely beyond compare.
 - God designed marriage to exhibit the beautiful devotion that His saints have to Christ.
 - She is fulfilling her role, whatever the world may say, and is lovely.
 - And when the marriage in view is that of the church to Christ, it is exceedingly beautiful...
 - It is the way things are meant to be between Him and His creatures.
 - It is the way things will be beautifully and perfectly in the eternal kingdom of glory when He has brought His bride to perfection and cast out all His enemies.
 - How beautiful she is to all. How beautiful to Jesus Himself.
3. He Himself has made her beautiful by first loving her.
- His forgiveness makes her beautiful—she is no longer loaded with guilt, she is humble and able to confess her sins, she is able to be honest and true.
 - His promises and her trust in them give her rest in Him, assurance and hope of the future glory that He has promised,
 - She is secure and bold as a lion because she is in His care.
 - His teaching makes her beautiful, for He trains her in the ways of His household which is full of love and holiness... she learns to live beautifully.
 - His washing of regeneration removes all her corruption and filth, and His sanctifying grace continues to transform her and fit her for glory.
 - His full acceptance of her as His bride and His sister gives her a joyful sense of belonging and delight to be loved by one who is so high and excellent and whose lips are so sweet.
 - Like a bride who is thrilled with her husband, she is radiant!
 - She is full of joy to have such an excellent husband who loves her so.

- She is full of peace because she knows she is secure in His hands, that He will deal with Satan and all her enemies.
- She is full of hope because her future is with Him in His Father's house and that He will wash her with His word to make her pure at last.
- She is full of contentment because nothing in the world can compare to her husband.
- She is full of service because He is worthy of her all
- She is full of thanksgiving because He has given His life to redeem her.
- Above all, it is her love and devotion to Him that make her truly lovely.
 - She is radiant with love for Him.
 - That is what He delights in most and that is what she is restored to by Him.

C. You all need to frequently notice the beauty of the bride.

1. Read your Bible and see her beauty in the lives of the faithful saints.

- See the beauty of Abraham, leaving all to follow Christ at the start and then at the end of his days, ready to offer up Isaac, the son of promise that God gave him.
- See the beauty of Moses, Heb 11:25-26: **choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.**
- See Peter and John, so devoted to Christ that when they were beaten for preaching in His name, Acts 5:41: **they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**
- See the Apostle Paul, preaching Christ again and again under deprivation, persecution, insult, imprisonment, chains, stripes, beating with rods—counting it a gift to suffer for His name.

2. Read your Bible and see how the church is praised.

- Earlier, we read First Thessalonians chapter 1 where Paul speaks of the beauty of the Thessalonian church.
 - He tells how they received the word of God with much affliction so that their faith was spoken of throughout the world.
- In Eph 2:19-22, it speaks of us as God's glorious temple:
 - **Eph 2:19-22: Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**
- Peter uses the language of the Old Testament that the LORD used to describe the beauty of the bride in 1 Peter 2:9-10, saying:
 - **But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out**

of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

3. Read church history and see the beautiful devotion of the church to Christ.
 - Fox's book of martyrs tells of those who suffered persecution because of their love and devotion to Christ.
 - Fair Sunshine is a little book about the Covenanters who refused to submit to unbiblical worship and were slaughtered because of their love for Christ.
 - Missionary biographies tell of those who faithfully poured out their lives for the gospel... those such as Jim Elliot.
4. But perhaps even more important than that, gain an eye to see the beauty of the believers that are around you today—those living today.
 - a. It is a mark of the ungodly to miss this—to always find fault and criticize.
 - If they see John the Baptist “who came neither eating bread nor drinking wine,” to say, “He has a demon.”
 - And if they see Jesus who came “eating and drinking,” they say, “Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”
 - b. You need to learn to see the beauty of the people of God.
 - You need to be able to say, “Now there is a beautiful Christian,” because they *are* beautiful and Jesus thinks they are beautiful.
 - Not that you close your eyes to sin—if you love your brother, you need to rebuke him when he sins.
 - But when there is a beautiful Christian, don't be jealous or threatened by them so that you try to find fault.
 - Delight in the work of grace that you see in them and speak of it them and to others.

TRANS> And that brings us to our last point.

III. Beholding the beauty and devotion of the bride of Christ leads the daughters of Jerusalem to seek Christ.

- A. The question they ask the bride in our text (5:9) is a wonderful question.
 1. Seeing the devotion that makes the church the fairest among women, they are drawn to inquire about the object of her devotion.
 - We have seen the question already that they ask twice:
 - **What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, O fairest among women?**
 - Surely, it would be foolish for them to stop with the bride and her beauty in their admiration without looking at the husband that she is so devoted to!
 2. Like the Holy Spirit, she is not at all concerned with drawing attention to herself.
 - Being filled with the Spirit, she wants to draw everyone's attention to Jesus.
 - He is, as she will soon attest, the fairest of ten thousand.

- She may be the fairest among women, but that is only because her husband is the fairest among ten thousand, meaning that there is no one to compare with Him!
- B. This question, **What is your beloved more than *another* beloved, O fairest among women?** is a wonderful question that helps everyone.
1. It helps the bride who asked it.
 - It gives her an opportunity to speak of the one that she loves.
 - She is very glad to be asked this question because she loves to tell others of Him that they might see how wonderful He is and come to be devoted to Him too—with her.
 - It also has the benefit of encouraging her as she thinks of all the reasons that He is so special to her.
 - In this case, when she is feeling estranged from Him, it is especially helpful in rekindling her faith.
 2. Second, it helps the daughters of Jerusalem who do the asking.
 - a. When we as members of the body of Christ see the devotion of the church, we realise that we ourselves don't know Him as well as others...
 - When that happens, we do well not to cower, but to go to those who have such great love and to ask them to tell us why—What makes Jesus so special to you that you live the way you do?
 - In some cases, it may even be those who do not yet know Christ in a saving way who ask this question out of true ignorance but with true sincerity because the Lord is drawing them to a saving relationship with Himself.
 - They truly want to know more about Him and the Lord uses the testimony of those who are true believers to show them His worth and His faithfulness and His saving work so that they come to believe.
 - b. This question may also be asked by those members whose love for Him is just as great as anyone else's.
 - They see the devotion of a younger Christian and they are encouraged and want to know what they have learned of Christ—
 - They ask it to encourage the younger Christian and they ask it for their own edification and encouragement.
 - Many times a younger believer not only reminds a more mature believer of what they already know, but also gives them new insight about Him.
 - c. And then there are those among the visible church who ask this question in scorn...in a mocking way: What is your beloved more than another beloved?
 - How is He any different?
 - If He has deserted you and His watchmen have let you down and abused you, why don't you move on?
 - They have a root of bitterness, and they say,

- What good is He if following Him brings you into the wilderness to suffer and die?
 - Like Esau they say—“What good is my birthright in the church if I die of hunger?”
 - But I say, many who start out this way have been marvellously converted.
 - Tertullian was correct when he testified that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.
 - There are many persecutors, even executioners of the saints who end up taking their stand with the ones they were persecuting.
 - They see the devotion of those they are executing and it shows them that their Lord is worthy.
 - Paul joined those that he persecuted.
- C. So let me encourage you to ask this question, “**what is your beloved more than any other beloved?**” of each other.
1. Ask it especially of those who show great love to Christ.
 - “What is it that makes Jesus so special to you?”
 - It will be a great help to you and it will be a great help to them.
 - Ask a young believer to tell you what he is learning of Christ.
 2. This is how the body edifies itself in love.
 - We speak to one another about the excellence of Christ.
 - We see in each other the beauty of Christ and we speak to each other about His glory, His person, His work, His goodness and love, His promises, His law, His testimonies, and His judgements.
 - **Psalm 34:3: Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.**
 3. Even our weekly worship services are a time that God has appointed for us to learn from each other and speak to each other about the surpassing excellence of Christ.
 - One of the tasks of the preacher is to tell you of the surpassing excellence of Christ, of His saving work, of His calling, of His person, of His law.
 - We gather to sing praises, declaring to one another in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs the word of Christ—showing each other His worth.
 - We unite in ardent prayer, asking Him to show us His glory—to manifest Himself and His work to us.
 - We set forth the bread and the wine in the sacrament, declaring what Christ has done for our salvation.

Conclusion:

- We will do well to learn to see the beauty of the bride of Christ and of her devotion to Him, and then to ask her the question—“**What is your beloved more than any other beloved?**”

Next week we will look at how the bride answers this question.