

Return, Return, O Shulamite

Song of Solomon 6:10-13

28 November 2021

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

Introduction:

Please turn to the Song of Solomon.

- I have been preaching from this book for six months (over the last eight months, but with a hiatus in August and September).

We have seen how this Song sets forth the true experience of Christ and His relationship to the true believing church through the analogy of marriage.

- Even though the Scripture frequently uses marriage, and even the marriage bed, to describe our relationship with Him,
 - having an entire book in the Bible that is entirely devoted to this subject has a way of forcing us to pay attention to the ardent affection that Christ has for us and that we have for Him.
- We have seen that the Song is very realistic.
 - It doesn't paint the relationship as all rosy.
 - It describes the ups and the downs, the struggles and the triumphs, of our walk with the Saviour as His bride.
 - Keep in mind, of course, that the bride of Christ is one bride who is made up of many members—all believers make up His one true bride.
 - We can identify with the contents of this Song in our personal as well as our corporate relationship with Him—at the local level all the way up to the worldwide church level.
- Consider the great variety of experience that is described in this Song.
 - It opened with a description of our yearning for His kisses (1:1-4), that is, our desire for Him to show us how much He loves us (to manifest His love as John 14 expresses it). We speak of our delight in receiving His love!
 - It spoke next of our insecurity in His love when we consider our unworthiness and of how He graciously reassures us of His full acceptance of us. This was in 1:5-11.
 - Then the Song rose to even greater heights as it described how our delight in His love can rise to such intensity that we must beg Him to stop (1:12 -2:7).
 - This was followed by a description of His wonderful visits where He was depicted as leaping across the mountains like a gazelle to get to us, as warmly calling us so as to draw us out of shyness, and of our sense that we want these visits to continue forever. That was in 2:8-17.
 - But then in chapter 3, there was a time when, without explanation, He withdraw for a time, causing us to seek Him—but then to find Him (3:1-5).
 - In 3:6-11, He is seen as the great king who openly and publicly conveys us to Himself to be His bride—He brings us to His house by covenant as it were.

- In 4:1 – 5:2, we were taken aback by His praise of our beauty as His bride, and by the delight that He has in even one glance of love from us toward Him.
 - I explained that even the tiny beginnings of our love for Christ are the result of His all-powerful saving work. He loves to see our progress.
 - We saw how we are depicted as His garden where He grows the fruit that He delights in with His skilful and powerful hands.
 - The Song shows how all this makes us want to bring forth fruit for Him more than ever—we want Him to come to us and enjoy the fruit that we bring forth—the fruit being the new life that comes by His saving work.
- But then in chapter 5, verse 2, we saw the description of a time when we grew cold and unwelcoming toward Him.
 - This is all too common. We find it recounted all through the Bible—we lose our first love, we grow frigid toward our gracious divine husband, Jesus Christ.
 - In 5:2-3, we are shown to be unwilling to trouble ourselves enough to be intimate with Him, even to the point of leaving Him out in the cold night because we can't be bothered to open the door.
 - In 5:4, He arouses us so that we finally get up to open to Him, only to find that He is gone (5:5-6). He has withdrawn from us to teach us a lesson.
 - We are then depicted as going out in the night to find Him, and in our unrewarded quest, of growing stronger and stronger in our desire to be with Him (5:7-16), until at last He returns to us, and we find ourselves in His arms again (6:1-3).
- What happens next is wonderful.
 - In 6:4-13 we have a description of how He reassures us that He still loves us just as much as He did before.
 - Last week we looked at the first part of this in verses 4-9 where He told us how attractive we were to Him even during the time that He kept Himself away...
 - He explains that He could not keep Himself away (6:4-5), that we are still as lovely to Him as ever (6:5-7), and that we are His only bride (6:8-9).
 - He does not want the great nations of the earth, He wants those who are reconciled to Him by His saving work.
- He said much in those verses to reassure us, but He knows us.
 - He knows that even when we return to His arms after times of declension, we are often quite insecure, still wondering if He really accepts us or not.
 - So He does not stop at verse 9 like we did last week. He continues on the end of verse 13 and even beyond that, reassuring us of His full acceptance of us.
 - He knows that His true bride knows that she is unworthy of Him—entirely so—and we know that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy.
 - We need reassurance from Him that we are fully accepted by His grace.
 - Justification by His blood shed on the cross is the foundation of our acceptance, but here in the Song, He gives us the relational experience side of that acceptance.

- Justification is the forensic ground of our acceptance, but joy in the embrace of Jesus as His wife is the relational expression of our acceptance.
- He wants us to have both.
- Hence we have Romans and we have the Song of Solomon.

So let's pick up our reading at verse 10—chapter 6, verse 10 and we will read to verse 13.

- This is the word of God.

Song of Solomon 6:10-13: Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as *an army with banners*? ¹¹ I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded *and* the pomegranates had bloomed. ¹² Before I was even aware, my soul had made me *as* the chariots of my noble people. ¹³ Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you! What would you see in the Shulamite—as it were, the dance of the two camps?

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

- Let's look at how He continues to reassure us of His full acceptance of us despite our former rejection of Him.
 - In verse 10, He uses yet another illustration of His present delight in us.

I. He describes how we (His bride) stand out as light in an otherwise dark world.

- He uses a question to show our unique character.
 - He says, **“Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as *an army with banners*?”**
 - The question is a kind of exclamation.
 - “Who is this?” is like saying, “Look at her!”
- A. He begins by describing us as **“she who looks forth as the morning.”**
 - Interestingly, the words “looks forth” refer to looking down as from a window or from the sky.
 - Here the picture is of the morning light “looking down” upon the face of the earth, bringing in the new day that is (to use the words of James Durham), “both lightsome and refreshing, cheering and lovely, as it is the end of the darkness.”
 - The dawning of morning was, of course, a much more significant event in the days before electricity.
 - The bride of Christ is like that light coming into the world.
 - She introduces light where it was not.
 - She is the people in the world who represent the true and living God.
 - She is the one, cherished and redeemed by Christ, a people that show the whole world who the Father really is: His holiness, His justice, His wisdom, His vindictive wrath, His sovereignty, His power, His mercy, His love, His grace—all in a place where He was unknown because of sinful suppression of Him; all in a place where apart from her, He was unknown.

- What joy it gave to Jesus to see His little flock, called to be witnesses to the true and living God, shining forth in the world.
 - How glad we ought to be to shine our light as His witnesses in this dark world.
- B. Next, He describes us, His bride, as those who are **“fair as the moon.”**
- Here again we are shown to be conspicuous, like the great luminary of the night.
 - In the night, it is the moon that stands out above all the stars even though it is only reflective light.
 - So, Christ’s bride stands out to Him as light in a world where it is night.
 - As the moon, we are but a reflected light, but how fair (or lovely) it is in the darkness.
 - The bride is the one in whom the image of God is being renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, largely seen in her love for Jesus her husband who is the exact image of God in human flesh with whom she has union.
 - Yes, with Him, we are a household of light, beautiful to our Saviour whose house we are and who is also the builder of the house.
 - How fair is His house where His bride loves Him and lives in beautiful obedience and submission to Him!
- C. Third, He describes us, His bride, as those who are: **“clear as the sun.”**
- The Hebrew word *clear* is actually used in verse 9 above where it is translated *favourite*—the daughter who is the favourite of her mother.
 - It is elsewhere translated by the word *pure* as in Psalm 19:8 where it says that the commandment of the Lord is *pure, enlightening the eyes*, or Psalm 24:4 and 73:1 where it speaks of those who have a pure heart.
 - In Proverbs 14:4, it speaks of a *clean* stall because the stall is empty.
 - The word blends the idea of favoured with the idea of purity.
 - The sun is the most brilliant light in the world, it is unspotted and pure light such as is found nowhere else.
 - Such is the bride of Christ.
 - Was she cold to Him? Was she rude? She was.
 - But she is still the only light in the world.
 - By His saving work, she is still without spot or blemish through His atonement and in the promise of coming glory when she will at last be presented to Him as pure and complete in holiness.
 - There is no other sun but one in this world.

➤ The fourth thing that is mentioned in verse 10.

D. Here He describes us (again) of being **“as awesome as an army with banners.”**

 1. We looked at this unusual description last week in verse 4.

- We saw that it speaks of her as a force that overpowered Him—a force that He could not resist.
 - Because she had rebuffed Him when He had come to her, He had withdrawn from her to show her how unacceptable her conduct had been.
- He had determined that He would stay away for a time to allow her desire for Him to be strengthened even more.
 - But once her love was rekindled, her yearning for Him was so overpowering that He had to beg her to turn away (see verse 5).
 - She was like a terrifying army that He could not resist, such is His great love and desire to be with her. Of course He loves this.
- 2. This description of her as a army with banners is repeated in verse 10 to show how she stands out in the world of darkness above all others.
 - Love for the Saviour and love for God does not exist in this world of darkness until Christ brings it forth in His garden, that is, His bride.
 - And truly, it is the only thing that is at last truly beautiful to Him in the world.
 - He cannot keep Himself away from her.

II. In verses 11 & 12, Jesus explains to us (now that we are back in His arms) what He was doing while He was separated from us. He also explains how He was brought back to us.

- A. During His withdrawal, He was actually watching over us the whole time.
1. He was watching intently to see if our affection for Him had been rekindled.
 - In verse 11 He says: **I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded *and* the pomegranates had bloomed.**
 - The NKJV indicates that the bride is speaking here, but there is no indication of that in the grammar.
 - Most commentators who understand the Song allegorically (Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, George Burrows, and James Durham) understand this to be Him speaking.
 2. What we have here is Him watching to see if His withdrawal has had its desired effect on her.
 - He wants to see if it has caused her love for Him to bud and bloom again.
 - He wants to see if she is ready to receive Him now—if the time has come for Him to again manifest His love to her.
 3. We should be greatly encouraged to know that even when the Lord has withdrawn for a time—for whatever reason—He is never far from us!
 - He is always there with His loving concern and care, watching over us, watching our progress and working to ensure that we continue to grow and flourish and that nothing will by any means harm us.
 - He hears all our prayers and counts all our tears.
 - In all our afflictions, He is afflicted.
 - He is never aloof.
 - Be encouraged that this is true even when we have greatly sinned.

- Even if we have done some great sin like David with his adultery that he then tried to cover up...if instead of repenting, we have been avoiding Him.
 - Even when He is chastening us and showing us an angry face, He is still watching over us closely and tenderly caring for us.
 - At the bottom of it all, He is still unrelentingly committed to us and watching eagerly for the signs of our repentance.
- B. In v. 12, He explains how in watching us, He found Himself powerfully drawn to us.
- He says, verse 12: **Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people.**
1. This is one of the most difficult verses in the Song of Solomon to interpret (many say the most difficult verse in the Song), so allow me to break it down a little.
 - a. First, the words “Before I was even aware” show how rapidly He was drawn back to us.
 - No sooner had He looked, than He saw, in this case, our strong yearning for Him and realised that it was already the time for love.
 - He realised that we had learned our lesson and were ready to receive Him.
 - b. Next, the words, “my soul” in the phrase, “my soul had made me...” speak of His whole person.
 - His entire self was moved by what He saw in us, His bride.
 - c. Next, what do the words “my soul made me as the chariots” mean?
 - The words “made me as the chariots” can also be translated “set me on the chariots.”
 - The idea is that His soul either got on a chariot or became a chariot, whose purpose was either to bring Him to His bride or to bring her to Him, and to do it swiftly.
 - Understand that because we are not speaking of physical distance, but the distance that was between us relationally,
 - the point is that He who was keeping Himself apart from us (relationally) until our affection was sufficiently rekindled, was now wanting to make haste to close the gap between us.
 - Either He will get on the chariot or He will be to us a chariot to bring us to Him.
 - Either way, it will be the same result...
 - So He is telling us, now that we are in His arms again, how He couldn’t stay away from us.
 - d. And finally, what do the words “of my noble people” mean in the phrase “chariots of my noble people?”
 - Some interpreters believe it simply refers to the quality and speed of the chariots—that they are the fine chariots of noble people.

- There certainly is an eagerness to close the distance between them that this interpretation adds to, but I think there is more than that here.
 - The word *noble* is *nadib* in Hebrew.
 - It is often translated *prince* and speaks of a person who acts of his own free volition. In Psalm 110:3, this word is used to say that God's people will be willing volunteers in the day of His power.
 - This opens up a beautiful interpretation that the bride's yearning (our yearning) for Christ is the chariot that conveys Him back to us to end our separation.
 - We have already seen that it was His touch that gave us this unrelenting yearning for Him ever since we arose to open to Him.
 - It is Christ's own work in us that gave us this yearning, but now this yearning of ours is the chariot that brings Him back to us—to manifest His love to us again.
 - He has seen that His work has rekindled our affection for Him so that we are ready to receive Him now.
 - Our yearning for Him is the chariot that His soul is set on that brings Him back to us.
2. Here is how a couple of commentators summarise this verse for us.
- James Durham explains the whole like this: “Here is set down how suddenly He is transported with affection to His Bride; while He is viewing her graces in His absence from her, He is so taken with love to her, that He can stay no longer from her.”
 - Matthew Henry says: “Christ could not long content Himself with this [separation from her], but suddenly felt a powerful, irresistible, inclination in His own bosom to return to His church, as His spouse, being moved with her lamentations after Him and her languishing desire towards Him.”
3. This is super encouraging.
- Our Lord Jesus is showing us here that He cannot endure to be separated from us once he sees that our desires for Him have been rekindled.
 - What an encouragement this is for us to pray.
 - Matthew Henry comments, “No chariot sent for Christ shall return empty.”
 - We sent out the chariot to call Him to return to us and He gets on the chariot and comes.
 - Last week, we saw how Jacob would not let go of the Lord until He blessed him and how the LORD changed Jacob's name to Israel because as a prince, Jacob had prevailed with Him—he had overcome Him.
 - Our Lord comes on our yearning prayers as on a swift chariot so that once again we are in His arms, loving Him and being loved by Him.

TRANS> So our LORD tells us that our rekindled love has brought Him back to us. Now that we are again in His arms, He tenderly tells us that we need not hold back or hesitate.

III. In verse 13, He insists that we return to Him without holding back.

- He wants to make sure that we come with complete assurance that He will not reject us. He wants us to come without restraint or any fear of rejection.

A. Look at how strong His appeal is!

1. He repeats the call to return four times: **Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return.**

- He wants nothing partial here, nothing uncertain, nothing hesitant.
 - The quarrel is over.
 - His acceptance is full and complete.
 - This is what justification does—it completely clears the record of all the wrongs that we have ever done.
 - You can come to your Lord and give yourself wholly to Him with complete abandon—that is what He wants you to do.

2. Notice how He calls us *Shulamite* here.

- I have explained to you before that this name, *Shulamite* is the feminine form of His name, *Solomon*.
 - *Solomon* means Prince of Peace, one of the names of our Lord Jesus, and *Shulamite* is our name when we marry Him, *Princess of Peace*.
 - We become a people of *shalom*, the rich Hebrew word that we translate by the English word peace, which also includes the idea of *wholeness* and *prosperity*, fullness of life as life is meant to be.
- It is from the Bible that we have the tradition of a wife taking her husband's name when she marries him. She enters his household.
 - When God brought Eve to Adam to be his wife, Adam who was man (Ish) said, **"She shall be called woman (Isha) because she was taken out of man."** (Gen 2:23)
 - In Genesis 5:1-2, the scripture tells us that God did the same thing with the name Adam. **Gen 5:1: This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind [Adam] in the day they were created.**
 - In Isaiah 4:1, we read of this general practice in these words: **Isa 4:1: And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, "We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach."**
- This speaks of the unity that we have with Christ—that we are given His name. Indeed, we are called *Christians* when we become His bride.
 - And here in the Song of Solomon, when He calls us to return to Him after we had drifted away, He calls us Mrs. Solomon, reminding us that we belong wholly to Him and so ought to wholly return to Him.

3. It is understandable how we might be insecure in returning to Him.

- He is a holy and majestic King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the very Son of God; and we are of the fallen race of Adam who have shown ourselves once again to be unworthy of Him.
 - But His invitation is clear—He is a gracious and welcoming husband who wants us to return with full confidence in His love and acceptance.
 - He wants us to enjoy again the peace and the joy that we had lost.
- B. He wants us to celebrate our restoration to Him with undiluted joy and gladness.
- You can see in the last part of verse 13.
1. He tells us that He wants to look upon us with His friends. Return, return, “that we may look upon you!”
 - We have seen how He delights in our beauty as His bride, how He is ravished with but one look of our eyes; how He delights to taste of our fruits.
 - Yes, we present ourselves to our Lord, and it is our love for Him that He wants to see most of all—that is what we are to present to Him as the chief fruit of His saving work.
 - But along with that, He wants to see the rest of the fruit that is produced by His Spirit through His saving work.
 - Gal 5:22 says, **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**
 - Ephesians 5:9 says: **for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.**
 - In John 15, He tells us to abide in Him so that we will bring forth much fruit to the delight Him and His Father.
 - The fruit He speaks about in particular is love—that we abide in His love so that we love—and next to that is joy—that we should be filled with joy because we have Him as our husband.
- That is what He wants to see when He looks at us.
- These are the flowers and the fruits that grow in us as His garden, as His bride that He has taken to be His own.
2. And here at the end of verse 13, on the occasion of our return, the thing He wants to see most of all is our joy.
 - a. This desire of His is presented with a question: **What would you see in the Shulamite?** What do you want to see in her when she returns?
 - It is hard to tell who asks this question.
 - Some think it is the Shulamite, asking, “What would you see that is worthwhile in me?”
 - Some think that the beloved is asking it as a rhetorical question—a question that He then answers Himself.
 - Others think it is His friends whom He has invited to enjoy the fruits of His garden with Him in the past—the Father and the Spirit, the angels who rejoice over one sinner that repents, the shepherds of the church who rejoice when the lost sheep is found?

- It really doesn't matter who asks the question—I'd say it is His friends, but we aren't really told...
 - What matters is the answer: What does He want to see in the Shulamite who has just been restored to Him?
- b. He wants to see her “as it were the dance of two camps.”
- Those are the words—“the dance of two camps.”
 - What does this mean?
 - The word translated *dance* means just that.
 - The two camps could be two armies, two hosts, two companies—there are many ways to translate it.
 - But it seems that what He wants to see in the Shulamite's return is unmitigated joy such as is beautifully expressed in celebratory dance.
 - He wants her to go from sorrow to dancing full of joy.
 - She has been restored to Him and it is an occasion for celebration.
 - His friends make up one company and His bride makes up the other company and together they celebrate with unspeakable joy that she is united again to her husband.
 - Like the prodigal son, she has come back to Him, and Jesus, like the father in the parable, wants to have a great celebration.
 - He wants to see the dance of the two camps—the angels and all His friends and His bride—rejoicing.
 - George Burrows brings this out quite well when he says:
 - “The beloved would say, that she whose loveliness in His eyes He had been illustrating by so many comparisons, was an object of more delightful contemplation to Him, than bands beautifully attired, mingling in a sacred dance on a day of public rejoicing... Here was a source of pleasure... such as is felt from gazing on the combination of lovely forms, crowning with their elegance of form, shape, beauty of dress, and grace of movement, some public festal scene; more beautiful than when on the shore of the Red Sea, Miriam took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances (Ex 15:20); than when David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord, with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps, leaping and dancing before the Lord (1 Chron 15:26).”
3. Do you see from this the great love of our Lord for us as His church?
- It should be precious to us that He not only rejoices at the fact of our restoration, but also when He sees our joy in that restoration.
 - Think of the whole church in all ages.
 - We rebelled. He sent us into exile. Then He restored us, but our joy was mingled with sorrow and insecurity until Jesus came.

- Then, when we saw what God had done to save us... when we saw the completeness of our salvation—our joy was made full.
 - There was no more uncertainty about our complete acceptance.
 - The New Testament stresses the joy that is now our birthright.
 - Our husband has said, “Return, return, Mrs. Solomon, return, return.”
 - He has taken away our sackcloth and girded us with joy.
 - He has turned our sorrow into dancing full of joy.
 - He wants to see this joy in us as His bride—He has revealed His salvation that our joy may be full.
- And this is for each of you individually as well.
 - Whatever you may have done—
 - Return, return, Mrs. Solomon, return, return.
 - Let your joy be full. Do not wallow in your past sins.
 - Let there be no half-hearted returns to Him—only full returns.
 - He will be delighted to see you bask in the fullness of His saving work and in His full acceptance of you.