

Song of Solomon 1: 5; "I am Dark but Lovely", Sermon # 7 in the series - "I am my Beloved's", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 28th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

As we think of our relationship of spiritual marriage with our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, we as believers should understand that there are certain ways in which the Christian life is a paradox. "A paradox is a condition with seemingly contradictory qualities or phases," the dictionary says. When we see the statement being made by the Bride that she is black but lovely, we know that she is not saying this because she is ashamed of her race or because she is boastful of her beauty in any selfish sense. She is saying this because this very correctly represents the way that all believers should see themselves spiritually during the time of their earthly pilgrimage. There is something dark about Christ's bride spiritually, and there is something very beautiful about her spiritually. And these things, although they seem to contradict each other, they very aptly describe the way that the true Christian sees themselves. There is a correct way to view yourself as a Christian and an incorrect way to view yourself as a Christian. You and I should seek to discover from the Bible the correct view. If the Christian only sees themselves as black, it will not be right or good because it denies the reality of the grace of Christ at work in their life. If the Christian only sees themselves as lovely, they will deceive themselves as to the extent of the great work yet to be accomplished in their life by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth is; that the Christian is both; black and lovely. And so I would like to open up this truth this afternoon by asking 1st - What does it mean when the Shulamite bride states that she is black? And secondly - What does it mean when she says that she is beautiful? Let's join together in learning more about the paradox which the true Christian is, during their life and stay here upon the earth.

1st of all - What does it mean when the Shulamite Bride states that she is black?

The bride is speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem. The daughters of Jerusalem, I believe, are the picture of persons who are close to the kingdom or they are younger believers in their faith than the Shulamite. They are people who come to church and they hear the word preached and perhaps they have even believed in Christ. But they are afraid to make a profession of faith until they can see what the experience of others who have gone before them, is like. They do not understand much about Christian experience. They do not understand the paradox of the Christian life as of yet. But they want to know more, and they are curious about how a true Christian can be black and lovely at the same time. This is often the plight of the persons that I have just mentioned, that they simply see the excitement of being betrothed to the king and being brought into His chambers, but they do not see or understand the great struggle that goes on in the life of the maturing Christian who has discovered more and more of what he or she is really like without the grace of Christ coming to their rescue. The daughters of Jerusalem are those who do not understand themselves yet. They do not know their own heart well yet. They remind me of John Wesley before his conversion. Wesley had come to Georgia in 1736 as a

missionary desiring to see the Indians converted to Christ. He was a very formally religious man, and he could preach law and duty well enough, but he could not preach grace as of yet. A. Skevington Wood in his biography of Wesley entitled *The Burning Heart* says, "On arrival off the coast of Georgia, Governor Oglethorpe took a boat up the Savannah River and brought back the leader of the Moravian settlement, August Gottlieb Spangenberg." "He was the second-in-command to Count Zinzendorf himself, and later succeeded him at the mother community in Hernhut." "It was a moment full of potential when these two men met." They immediately took to each other." "The pair of them had long talks together, during the course of which Wesley's vocation was discussed." "It was to prove a turning point in his thinking." "Up to now he had hoped to find the answer to his personal need in the prosecution of a practical task." "Spangenberg proceeded to indicate the reverse procedure." "When Wesley asked for advice concerning his work, Spangenberg instead pressed some highly personal questions. "Do you know yourself?" "Have you the witness within yourself?" "Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" Well, Wesley did not know the blackness of his heart as of yet, and it would be some months until he was converted, but the Lord was working in his heart and he was interested in spiritual experience. He would later confess, "I came to this land to see the Indians converted and found that I myself was not converted."

But we have some parallelism given to us here in verse 5. The Bride's being black relates to the tents of Kedar and her being lovely relates to the curtains of Solomon. John Gill says that, "Kedar was the second son of Ishmael whose posterity dwelt in the deserts of Arabia." The tents of Kedar were very black. This was because they were "made of goat's hair and when they were exposed to the sun and the rain, they became very black." They "looked very mean and contemptible." The Bride is saying that this is how she is in herself, what her condition and heart would be like apart from grace. Often, when a person first believes and they come to know that they are forgiven, they know that legally their life is a clean slate in terms of the guilt of their sins. They know that they have been washed as white as snow. But they then mistakenly think that there is nothing black or dark about their heart any more; their heart will not be treacherous any more. But experience will teach the Christian that this is not the case. In themselves they are black. There are two forces, or laws, or aspects of nature at work in the life of a Christian; the Old nature or Old Man, who is crucified with Christ. The remains of this old nature in the life of the believer are perfect blackness. And then there is also the New nature or the New man who is the creation of the Holy Spirit who is given to the believer when he first believes. It is the flesh and the Spirit which exist alongside each other in the life of the believer. You see this in a number of places in the New Testament but turn with me to Romans Chapter 7, verse 18. Here we have the Apostle Paul speaking of himself, but speaking also for the experience of all true believers. "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." Looking to himself, Paul does not find anything but blackness. Here he identifies that this "flesh" or Old nature is still with him, but it is not the

ruling force in his life any more. In Galatians 2: 20 Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...." But nevertheless he struggles greatly with it. You can see this in verse 20 of Chapter 7 of Romans. "Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." That sin dwelling or which remains in him is called the flesh. It is pure darkness and blackness.

Now turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 6 for another example of the experience of blackness in the life of the believer. Isaiah is receiving a vision from God, and it is a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and train of His robe filled the temple." "Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." "And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'" "And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke." "So I said: 'Woe is me for I am undone!'" "Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Here we have not only a believer, but a prophet of the Lord; a holy man of God. And yet when he finds Himself standing in the presence of the King; he sees his blackness immediately. How great is the beauty and glory of the Lord. And how great is the blackness of our heart when placed in the light of His holy presence! Notice that in our text that the Bride freely confesses her own blackness. Thomas Robinson in his commentary says, "The believer is not afraid to acknowledge that he is black." "His safety and comfort are not found in his not being black, or less black than others; but in his being beautiful in Christ and washed in His blood." "His sense of blackness, therefore is no hindrance to his rejoicing in Christ, but rather a help to it." "Confession of blackness is part of our rejoicing in Christ's comeliness." "The blacker we are in our own eyes, the more precious is Christ."

But being black like the tents of Kedar means more, yet, than this. It also refers to the mean and despised condition of the Church of Jesus Christ while she is in this world, due to her afflictions and sorrows. Turn with me to Psalm 120 and you will see this. "In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me." "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue." "What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?" "Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!" "Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!" "My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace." "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war." This psalm is attributed by many commentators to David and it is probably referring to the time when he was fleeing from Saul and ran into all that trouble with Doeg the Edomite, who betrayed the fact that he had come to Abimelech and the priests looking for help and refuge. It later became the cause of many of those priest's dying. It was this type of people; people who were for war against him without a cause, that was the reason that David wrote this psalm. David was forced to run, and hide, and flee continually for some years

because of these persecutions against him. It is a picture of the Church in the wilderness of this world, having to endure persecution and tribulation. In verse 6, she says to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me." (American Standard Version) She is saying, "Do not think that you should hesitate to become a Christian or make a public profession of faith because you see that I have gone through difficulties and persecutions." "I have come to realize that these are one of the ways that I will bring glory to my Savior and King, the Lord Jesus Christ." You remember the parable of the Sower and the soils that we studied earlier in Mark. In Mark 4: 5 it says, "Some seeds fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth." "But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away." This is interpreted by Jesus in verse 17, by His saying, "Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake immediately they stumble. The Shulamite did not stumble. She had the root of the matter in her heart, of love to Christ, and was willing to endure these things for Him. This leads us to our second question this afternoon....

What does it mean when the Bride says that she is beautiful or lovely?

"I am dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon." It says in verse 5, "I am dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon." The curtains of Solomon were no doubt very beautiful because Solomon was very rich and very wise in all of his building and decorating. Similarly when we believe in Jesus Christ and are brought into His chambers, He builds and decorates our lives with the beautiful things of His grace. This is what the curtains here represent. Turn with me to Psalm 45, verse 10. Here we have a description of what the royal daughter, the King's Bride is to do when she marries Him and is brought into His palace to live with Him. "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him." "And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favor." "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold." "She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You." "With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought, they shall enter the King's palace." The Lord Jesus brings the sinful needy believer into His palace of salvation. He doesn't let the believer in Himself stay in the ragged clothes of a beggar. He gives her "robes of many colors." She knows that she is unworthy of these riches and this honor. But He would have sweet fellowship with her, the most intimate of spiritual interaction with her. He would show her what great things that he has prepared for her, by first showing her the curtains and tapestries within the palace. He would dignify and beautify both her and the place where she dwells with Him.

"Her clothing is woven of gold." This statement pictures the value of the garments of salvation which are given to her. They are of the greatest value. All that Christ gives you, O believer is of the greatest and most inestimable value. It is said in

an earthly way; "clothes make the man." How we love to have new clothes and nice clothes. But how much more so the clothes which Christ gives to us. He give us the garments of salvation. He gives us the rich robe of righteousness as is spoken of in Isaiah 61: 10. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has covered me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and a bride adorns herself with her jewels." The robe of righteousness is the imputed righteousness of Christ which is given to believer when they are married to Him; when they first believe. Without this garment they cannot come into the marriage ceremony and neither can the come to the wedding feast. When Jesus taught the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew Chapter 21, He said in verse 11, "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment." "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' "And he was speechless." This garment that is so essential, is woven of the finest materials; that of the perfect and sinless obedience of Christ our Savior; loving worked out with great thoughtfulness and diligence so that it would fit our person exactly. Where you were careless and thoughtless and unloving, He was careful, thoughtful and loving toward God and men. Where you were selfish and jealous and envious toward others, He was kind and caring and thought to establish their highest well-being. Where you were selfishly ambitious and proud and conceited, He laid aside His glory and humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on the cross for you. All of His good work was woven into a seamless garment for you. That garment was taken off Him before He went to the cross. The soldiers would not tear it, but they did cast lots for it. All this is a picture of grace. Why do we who believe end up wearing what we do not deserve; the garment of Christ's perfect righteousness, so that God sees us perfect and complete in His sight when He looks at Christ, and therefore doesn't see sin in us? It is all of grace and we cannot tell the reason. But we do greatly rejoice.

The curtains hanging in the palace of salvation; the palace which Christ built, are that which adorn the palace and they are an expression of Christ's great love for us that He would make even the place where we dwell here upon the earth a pleasant place, even though life is full of trials and difficulties; we find that God is our dwelling place and He has furnished our heart's experience with many good things. Turn with me to Ezekiel 16. God through the prophet, in this chapter is speaking of all that He had done for Israel in bringing her out of Egypt and out of idolatry. In the first 6 verses he describes her blackness and helplessness, and how He saved her. In verse 7 he says, "I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured and became very beautiful." "Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare." "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love, so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness." "Yes, I swore and an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, says the Lord God." "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil." "I clothed you in

embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk." "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck." "And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head." "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth." "You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil." "You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty." "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you, says, the Lord God." All the splendor and beauty of the Christian is something that the Lord has bestowed on them. It was and is all of Jesus. The Lord God bestows His splendor on us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Will you not remember this as the days go by, O believer? What privileges and blessings that your life is adorned with. What an amazing and beautiful tapestry is being woven in the palace of salvation which He has brought you into. He has taken us up out the muck and the mire of sin and He has washed us and cleansed us of all of our sins. He has clothed us with garments of righteousness. He has given us the finest of spiritual food to eat, in His blessed word. He has made curtains for the chambers of the Palace of His Love, our hearts, so that we might admire His perfect work for us, and be well-satisfied to remain in constant fellowship with Him, rather than go after the pleasures of the world and our flesh. We are black, but lovely. Let us not be ashamed to tell others that it is so.