

Christ my Beloved – Song Series

The Backslidden Bride

Text: Song of Solomon 5:2-8

Introduction:

1. In this portion of the Song, the bride enters a state of spiritual slothfulness and her Beloved comes to awaken her out of that condition to a renewed place of devotion and revival. There are some heart stirring truths concerning the danger of backsliding and how we might recover from it.
2. “We have all experienced interrupted communion and it can almost immediately follow periods of delightful fellowship like the one described in the previous chapter.” (Ironsides)
3. This is an experience every child of God can identify with. It is the symptom of that internal war we encounter between the flesh and the Spirit. Gal. 5:17 *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”*
4. In the Song we see weaknesses and inconsistencies in the Bride, but never in the Bridegroom. His love and faithfulness are never cast in a negative light. So it is with the relationship between Christ and the believer. Christ is faithful and unchanging but, on our end, we often fail and falter.
5. Let’s consider this challenge concerning the danger of backsliding under 4 headings.

I. The Apathy of the Bride (Vs. 2a; 3)

A. Slothfulness (Vs. 2a)

1. “I sleep” = speaks of a state of spiritual slumber. She is not alert, watchful and active. She has grown careless and comfortable.
2. “A spiritually sleepy believer takes more leisure and pleasure, turning increasingly to secular concerns, and looking to possessions and career advance to satisfy the longings of the heart.” (Masters)
3. Romans 13:11-12 *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to **awake out of sleep**: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”*

B. Stubbornness (Vs. 3)

1. She responds to the appeals of the Bridegroom with excuses. She has adopted a comfortable approach to her relationship with Him and is resistant to the idea of service and sacrifice. She is indulging the appetites of the flesh.
2. “I have put off my coat” = she has retired for the night and does not wish to get out of bed

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3. “I have washed my feet” = imagery based on Oriental custom of washing the feet before retiring for the night. In those days this was very necessary as the feet would get very dusty and dirty from the days activities with sandals being the typical footwear.
4. This is not a zeal for purity on the behalf of the bride but an unwillingness to get her feet dirty in service. The security of our salvation is a precious thing but should not lead us to spiritual laziness. We are to use our feet in the service of the Gospel (Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15).
5. Challenge: When Christ comes and desires fellowship with us, what excuses do we give Him? Are we like Martha, too busy with our own plan to make time for spiritual intimacy or are we like Mary, sensitive to seize the moment to sit at His feet?

II. The Awakening of the Bride (Vs. 2b; 4)

She was awakened by...

A. The Sound of His Voice (Vs. 2b)

In love, the Bridegroom comes to awaken her out of her slumber. He does not allow her to continue in her backslidden state without a visitation from Himself. He appeals to her on the basis of:

1. His Relationship to Her – note the four terms of endearment He uses of her each commencing with the possessive ‘my’
 - a. “My sister” = she is purchased. Christ is the firstborn among brethren.
 - b. “My love” = she is precious. She is the object of His heart’s devotion.
 - c. “My dove” = she is possessed (indwelt) of the Holy Spirit
 - d. “My undefiled” = she is pure. She has been washed and cleansed from the defilement of sin.
 - e. Illustration: Christ knocking on the door of the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:20)
2. His Sacrifice for Her – He makes reference to His hair being dampened with the dew of the night revealing the fact He was weathering the conditions of the night season to come to her.
 - a. Illustration: Consider the night scenes in the earthly ministry of our Lord where He spent a night of prayer on a mountain (e.g. Luke 6:12) and his hair was dampened with the dew of night.
 - b. Illustration: Consider the night scene in Gethsemane where the sweat that bedewed His brow was “as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.” (Luke 22:44) How did the disciples respond to the Saviour when He came to them with his head filled with bloody dew and his locks with the drops of the night? They slumbered and slept (Luke 22:45).

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- c. How hard our hearts can become in our backslidden condition to remain stubborn and unmoved by our Lord's suffering love.

B. The Sight of His Hand (Vs. 4)

1. She was aroused from sleep by His voice but it was the sight of His hand that really moved her deeply.
2. "the hole of the door" = "the lock was on the inside of the door, and there was an opening where the owner could, if he had the key, reach in and use the key from the inside to open the door."
(Ironside) Though the Bridegroom was the rightful owner of the door, yet he does not force Himself upon her. Rather, He entreats and pleads with her to rise from her slothful ease and to open to Him voluntarily.
3. "my bowels were moved" = the 'bowels' speak of the innermost feelings, the heart, the seat of the affections. In like manner, as we look at our Saviour's nail scarred hands, we cannot be stirred out of our backslidden slumber.
4. Illustration: Thomas revived at the sight of Christ's hands (Jn. 20:24-29)
5. "My name is graven on His hands, my name is written on His heart. I know that while in Heaven He stand, no tongue can bid me thence depart."

III. The Anguish of the Bride (Vs. 5-6)

A. The Withdrawal of His Presence (Vs. 5-6a)

1. "I rose up to open to my beloved" = finally after stubborn delay, she rises from her bed of ease to obey the call of her Groom
2. "my hands dropped with myrrh...upon the handles of the lock" = imagery is based on the Oriental custom of a lover anointing the handle of the door lock with myrrh as a token of the reality and depth of his love for her. (E.C. Hadley)
3. "but my beloved had withdrawn himself" = she had delayed her obedience too long. If only she had yielded when He called, she could have enjoyed His sweet fellowship! But her inaction and indifference has grieved Him.

B. The Withholding of His Presence (Vs. 6b)

1. She begins to seek after Him but her seeking will initially be met with silence and disappointment. She is not seeking to recover her salvation as she has not ceased to belong to Him but she is seeking to recover the enjoyment of His presence.
2. The purpose of the withdrawing and withholding of His presence is to chastise her for her disobedience and to stir in her a greater appreciation of His presence.

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3. “She must now be chastised for her ingratitude, lack of love, lightness, pride, self-concern, love of ease, and indifference to the voice of conscience.” (Masters)

IV. The Ambition of the Bride (Vs. 7-8)

A. A Persistent Seeking (Vs. 7)

1. Awakened and now aware of what she has lost, she will go on seeking until her fellowship with her Beloved is restored.
2. “For the backslidden saint the return into former communion is frequently difficult.” (Flanigan)
3. She encounters opposition from the watchmen during this quest. The watchmen are the keepers of the city and speak of the oversight of spiritual leaders. But sadly, instead of aiding the bride in her request for spiritual recovery, they wound her. What a picture of the damage spiritual leaders often do in hindering the Christian who is trying to get back in fellowship with the Lord.

B. A Passionate Saying (Vs. 8)

1. She begins to reach out and involve others in her quest and makes a bold declaration of her love.
2. “sick of love” = she was overwhelmed with this sense of love for her Beloved. The phrase does not have the sense of “I am sick of this” as we often use it today. Rather, it is an expression of her deep yearning after him.

Conclusion:

1. How often do we resist our Beloved’s invitations to fellowship? Are we indulging the impulses of the self-life and thus damaging our walk with Christ? Have we grown comfortable and complacent?
2. Are you seeking to recover from spiritual decline? Be encouraged and press on to full restoration. Do not lose heart or become discouraged if the Lord chastens you with silence for a time. In the end it will work in you the blessed effect of treasuring the Lord and His presence so much more.