

Asleep, but my heart is awake

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back then to the passage that we read and look again at chapter 5 from verse 2 onwards.

Song of Solomon chapter 5 and verse 2. I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound my beloved is knocking.

Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one. For my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I had put off my garment, how could I put it on?

I had bathed my feet, how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with lip-good myrrh on the handles of the boat.

I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him and found him not.

[1 : 06] I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. They beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him, I am sick with love. Especially the words at the beginning of verse 2, I slept, but my heart was awake. Song of Solomon is a part of scripture that we used to, certainly when I was much younger, used to hear preached on quite regularly, but very rarely now.

I don't know if that is your experience or not. And perhaps one of the reasons why it's not preached on as often as it used to be, is that we have lost sight of the meaning of Song of Solomon.

Most people tend to classify the Song of Solomon as a very difficult piece of scripture to understand. And yet, it's not really that difficult to understand on one level.

[2 : 35] The Jews always used to read the Song of Solomon at Passover time. It was the book that was read.

And that in itself tells us so clearly the answer to many of the objections that are made, even to Song of Solomon being part of scripture.

It's a book in which the name of God is not mentioned. And therefore, there are those who think nowadays that it shouldn't even be in what we call the canon of scripture at all.

It shouldn't form part of the word of God. But the Jews had no doubt about it at all.

It was one of their sacred books ever since the time it was written. Who wrote it? Well, it's very clearly told to us at the beginning in chapter 1 and verse 1.

[3 : 38] The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. And in the original Hebrew, it is a poem.

It is written as a piece of poetry. Many scholars will tell you that it is one of the most beautiful pieces of love poetry that has ever been written.

Particularly in the original language. I'm sure you will know very well how difficult it is to translate poetry from one language to another.

Because when you do that, you lose much of the rhythm and the rhyme in the original, which cannot be expressed in the same way in the target language.

But rather than perhaps thinking of song as a poem, it's much easier to understand the song if you think of it as a little play.

[4 : 44] A play which has two major characters and two or three other characters. And a play which basically has five separate scenes in it.

Who are the characters? Well, there's Solomon himself, of course. And then there is the bride. And the bride, in the course of the song, is never actually named.

The only time that she's identified is in chapter 6 and verse 13, where we read that she is referred to as the Shulamite. And that's the only name that we find for her.

We are given quite a bit of characterization about her in chapter 1. But then, to understand the purpose of the song, we need to break down into the five different scenes that we see in the song. The first part deals with the betrothal. And it runs from chapter 1 into chapter 2. It is the betrothal. [5 : 56] And again, remember that a Jewish betrothal was very similar to an engagement. It lasted for at least a year. You can see that in the New Testament when you see Mary betrothed to Joseph, probably from an early age.

The second part, chapter 2 into chapter 3, is the actual nuptials. And then we get the marriage feast in chapter 3 onwards into chapter 5.

And the first part of the song basically deals with the love between a man and a woman, a husband and his bride. And we should never forget that.

Song is a love song. It deals with the love of the husband and the bride for each other.

But like all marriages, after a period of time, where the, as we call it, the honeymoon period is over, then there comes sometimes a period of coolness, a period of distance between the two.

[7 : 17] where the honeymoon being over, we settle down into the routine of married life.

And that happens from the verse that I have taken as a text here, from chapter 5 and verse 2 onwards. And here in this part, we will see the consequences of that coolness in the relation.

The final part from chapter 6, midway through chapter 6 through to the end, returns to the portion and explanation of married life once things have returned, if one can say, to normal.

If anything in a married life can ever be referred to as normal, whatever normality actually means.

But here we see a change, an apparent change in the relationship.

We have seen before in chapter 4, how the groom refers to his bride. A garden locked is my sister.

[8 : 34] And he goes on to describe the beauties of this garden. And the metaphors that are used there are metaphors that we need to look deeper into to see exactly what he is talking about.

It's quite easy just to see the song as a piece of erotic Hebrew poetry that celebrates love. But there's much more to it than that.

Why would a love song between a man and a woman be regarded by the Jews as one of their most sacred pieces of scriptural text?

Why would they regard it, even though it doesn't mention the name of God, why would they regard it as divinely inspired?

And again, of course, with our standard rule of how we interpret scripture, we have to interpret scripture by using scripture.

[9 : 47] What is it that the song is really about? Well, it is not just about physical love.

It is not just about spiritual love. But it symbolizes something much deeper. In various parts of scripture, you will see that the relationship between God and his people is referred to in terms of the marriage covenant.

There are many texts that one could quote on that, but particularly Isaiah 54 and verse 5 says, Thy maker is thy husband.

That is why so often you find throughout, particularly through the prophets, the relationship between Israel and God referred to as an adulterous one.

because the people of Israel had gone off to worship idols. And they had left the worship of the true God.

[11 : 05] And God, through his prophets, describes that so often as an adulterous relationship.

That the people have committed whoredom in running after idols here, there, and everywhere.

But it is when we come into the New Testament that we see more key passages that remind us of the relationship, the covenant relationship between God and his church.

If you look at Ephesians 5, a passage which is very often used in the marriage ceremony, you will find there are various instructions on the relationship between the husband and the wife.

But then Paul says so clearly, but I speak of Christ and the church. That this is a great mystery, but I speak of Christ and the church.

And if you go further on into the visions of John in the book of Revelation, you will find that we see in chapters 21 and 22 how the new Jerusalem descends from heaven adorned like a bride for her husband.

[12 : 31] The imagery of Song of Solomon is reminding us all the time of the covenant relationship between God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and his people.

That is what the bride of Christ is. The bride of Christ is the church. Samuel Rutherford in his letters and many of his sermons often refers to the church as the black wife of Christ.

And he takes that from the first chapter of Solomon where the Shulamite says in verse 5, I am very dark, or I am black, in the authorised version, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Many have speculated from that that this was a love song to Solomon's first wife, who was the daughter of Pharaoh. And again, of course, that was a marriage that was probably arranged for political reasons.

But whether that is the case or not, it's impossible to say. But it's very clear when you look at the song as a whole, that whoever wrote it, Solomon writing it, had experienced all the different stages of marriage.

[13:57] It's not written in the first flush of love, in the first few years, in the honeymoon period. Because, as we see in this part, the relationship at times is not what it should be.

And so we read, I slept, but my heart was awake. Now you might think, that's quite normal. What's unusual about that?

If your heart was asleep, you would be dead. So when you're sleeping, your heart continues to work. But that's not what the reference is here. We'll come back to that in a moment or two.

But here we see a scene where the wife, the Shulamite, the bride, has gone to rest by herself. herself. That in itself raises one or two questions, which we'll come back to again.

And she has gone to bed, and not only has she gone to bed, but she has also locked the door. Now I don't know how often it happens to you, but I would be most surprised if I found our bedroom door locked by my wife when I am attempting to go to bed.

[15:20] It would signify some kind of serious breakdown that I would have been unaware of in the relationship. And this is what we find here.

That the groom, my beloved, is knocking at the door. And as he knocks at the door, he tries to open it.

In verse 4, we see my beloved put his hand to the latch. And again, it's easy to understand that if we think of the old kind of latches they had in the tent do in the black houses, where you opened it by putting your finger through the hole and simply lifted up the latch.

That's probably the same kind of latches as they had there. My beloved put his hand to the latch.

But before that, see the excuses that the bride makes.

I had put off my garment in verse 3. How could I put it on? I had bathed my feet. How could I soil them?

[16:30] And immediately, our first thought is, why is she making excuses to get up, to open the door to her husband?

Where has he been? Well, at the beginning of the chapter and in the part of the chapter before that, we see that he has been in his garden.

And in chapter 6, we see that she says herself in verse 2, My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the bed of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies.

That is what the beloved does. That is what the groom, the Lord Jesus Christ, through the work of his Holy Spirit, that is what he is doing all the time.

He is coming down to the garden here on earth. And the significance of the garden, as we see it as an image that is used quite often throughout the song, is that the garden represents the church here on earth, along with the bride.

[17:47] And there are times when he comes to gather his lilies. to take his beloved home, to take his people home to their eternal rest.

There are other times when he comes to visit the garden. And we see the description of the garden that is given in chapter 4 in the passage that we read.

a spring, a garden locked as my sister, a spring locked, a fountain sealed, and then with the various fruits and spices that are mentioned there.

Now, some of these we may well be familiar with. Quite sure that we've all perhaps used saffron and calamus and cinnamon, frankincense and myrrh and aloes, that these are the sort of spices we're quite familiar with.

But we might not be familiar with, for example, nard. I'd never seen nard until I bought a nard, a couple of nard plants in a garden center close to where we lived in Peru and I planted them in the garden.

[19 : 04] And the guy said to me, he says, you'll only see them flower once a year. And he said, when they flower, he said, watch them very carefully.

And so we did that. And for most of the year there was nothing except a few spikes of leaves and so on and then all of a sudden we could see the flower stem beginning to grow in the middle of the plant.

And it grew and grew and grew until it came into a big bud. And then one evening the bud opened. And it opened into a beautiful white flower. But what was spectacular was the perfume. The fragrance that it gave forth spread over the whole garden and into the house. And it lasted the whole night. By next morning the flower was gone. It lasted simply 24 hours. It's open for 24 hours.

[20 : 15] And it is no wonder that we find nard referred to in scripture as an expensive fragrant perfume. The perfume had to be extracted from the flower while it was open.

And so we find all these fragrances in the garden. And the fragrances represent the different plants in the garden.

It is the incense and the prayers that arises to heaven from the Lord's people. And you notice that they're not all the same.

They're all different. And they grow in different ways and they grow in different circumstances. But you see something else. That this garden is watered.

In verse 15, chapter 4 and verse 15, it is watered by a well of living water. This is the same living water that we see when Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman.

[21 : 22] And of course, without water nothing can grow. That's why we find in verse 16, awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind, the two things that are necessary to the garden.

The north wind brought rain, and the south wind brought warmth. And both of these things are necessary for the flow of the spices of the garden.

But then again, you and I have to be aware, that the use of the term wind in scripture, it's the same word in Hebrew for wind and for spirit.

And so often we find that when we see the wind referred to, the reference means the Holy Spirit. It is when the Holy Spirit is blowing from the garden, that you and I can breathe in the fragrance of those round about us.

It's referring to the fellowship that we have one with another through the word of God and through all the covenant relationship that we have with the Lord's people and with the Lord himself.

[22 : 44] And that of course is activated through and by the Holy Spirit. our Lord speaks about this when he talks to Nicodemus and he says, you don't understand what I'm talking about, that you need to be born again, but look at the wind, it blows, he says, wherever it will.

And what he means, of course, is referring to the Spirit bringing people to life. And once it's brought them to life, how the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, through the word of God ministers to and feeds each and every one of us.

Without that feeding, the word of God would be dry indeed. Remember how many times before you came to faith, you sat and perhaps tried to listen to a sermon, and it went in one ear and out the other.

Perhaps it didn't go in any ear at all, perhaps your mind was somewhere else. But once you were brought to life by this stream of living water through the work of the Holy Spirit, oh how sweet it was to listen to the word of God being expounded.

Things that you never understood before, things that you never paid any attention to suddenly had new meaning. And so it is as you and I meditate on and peruse the word of God.

[24 : 21] Sometimes a verse, a chapter that you've read a hundred times before and didn't really say anything to you, suddenly leaps out at you from the page and administers to your soul.

And that is the experience of every believer. believer. But nevertheless there comes a time usually in the believer's life where he grows cold.

I slept but my heart is awake. There are times when you and I are spiritually asleep.

we are still awake. That is, we have been brought to life. We are not, as Paul puts it, dead in trespasses and sins.

We are spiritually awake. But we are asleep. And sometimes a coldness grows into our lives even for the things of God, even for the word of God and sometimes even in our prayers if we continue to pray.

[25 : 37] And there are times when you and I feel so distant from the things of God. And sometimes you wonder why, why does God permit that to happen?

Why does the Holy Spirit not keep us refreshed in the word of God all the time? John Owen put it like this.

He said, we are always in union with Christ, but not always in communion. And that's the way it is in the Christian experience.

There are times when your experience is so sweet to you. Sometimes it may be in your own private devotions, other times in the means of grace, sometimes at the table during a communion season. And yet there are other times when it's not like that at all. And this is what the bride experiences here. I slept but my heart was awake.

[26 : 49] Why is this? God Paul explains it to us in Corinthians where he speaks particularly about the two natures that we have, the body of sin.

He perhaps states it more clearly in Romans 7 where he points out to us that we have two natures. One nature which is alive in Christ Jesus and the other nature which is the nature of death that struggles all the time to overcome our spiritual nature.

He says the things that I want to do it's not what I do and the things that I do they're not the things that I want to do. And so often that is the case with you and I.

When we should have gone perhaps to the prayer meeting or perhaps to the Sunday evening service or the morning service it's so easy for us to invent an excuse and say I don't think I'll go today.

After all it's only a prayer meeting. How often do I find myself saying that sometimes it's only a prayer meeting. Whereas perhaps a prayer meeting should be more important than any other.

[28 : 07] I sleep or as the authorised version puts it I am sleeping. That's the way it is in the Hebrew. I am sleeping but my heart was awake and you and I will perhaps make any excuse like the bride does here.

I had put off my garment how could I put on? I had washed my feet how could I dirty them? And yet nevertheless her heart leaps within her.

My beloved put his hand to the latch and my heart was thrilled within me. And yet when she goes to the door what does she find?

I opened to my beloved but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. And you and I are being reminded here that Christ is not, the presence of Christ is not at our beck and call. It's not at our convenience.

[29 : 12] It's not when we have a spare moment that we think, oh I'll sit down and spend some time with Christ. It is when he comes, you and I should be ready.

Should be ready to partake of this fellowship with him. And so often you and I search for this fellowship and fail to find it.

And we search for his presence and yet we don't find it in the way that we perhaps used to at previous times. And that's what happens to the Shulamite.

I arose too open to my beloved and my hands dripped with my fingers with liquid my on the handles of the bolt. Now there are two explanations of this usually given.

One that she herself had put her fingers in my in order to have the fragrance upon them before she met her beloved.

[30 : 21] But the other explanation and the one that I prefer is that the touch of the groom on the door had left the fragrance of my the touch of Christ of the Holy Spirit had left an aroma and a perfume that drew her to seek him even more and more.

And this is perhaps what happens in the experience of the believer. She goes looking my soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought him but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer. And sometimes in our private situations like she is in the room and sometimes in our public situations we don't find the communion with Christ that we are seeking for.

But you notice that she uses both both private and public means. She goes looking for him I sought him but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer.

The watchman found me as they went about in the city. And what did they do? They beat me. They bruised me.

[31 : 47] Oh think how often the people of God are beaten and bruised by the world round about them as they search for the presence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ through them.

How many of our brothers and sisters in so many other countries throughout the world are beaten and bruised daily as they search to fellowship with the risen saviour.

You and I don't have that problem and perhaps we are even more guilty in the sense that we are not persecuted in that way that our search for the presence of Christ is so poor at times that we spend so little time with our beloved.

They even take away our veil, the symbol of modesty, the symbol of her married marital status, thinking that she is simply possibly a prostitute and adulteress out in the streets at that time at night. And she calls out to the daughters of Jerusalem, I adjure you if you find my beloved that you tell them that I am sick with love.

[33 : 11] And you see this is very often the result of the Holy Spirit's withdrawal from the believer's life for a period of time.

The Holy Spirit is like the wind. It blows in one place and not necessarily in another. Why is it that one person can get immense blessing from a sermon and yet another will say, oh, I didn't really like it very much at all.

Is it because our heart is not receptive? Or is it simply that the Holy Spirit speaks in different ways to different people at different times?

Perhaps you can think of an occasion, maybe it happened to you yourself, in your own conversion where the word of God spoke powerfully to you, in a sermon, and yet it had no effect whatsoever perhaps on the person beside you.

How many times have you heard of other people being converted and you heard the same sermon and you got nothing from it? And yet now as you are alive spiritually as the people of God, not all of us require the same diet.

[34 : 37] Not all of us feed in the same way. but yet all of us have this cry, if you find my beloved, that you tell him, I am sick with love.

I am sick with love. And she responds to the question asked by the other woman round about, what is your beloved more than another beloved?

What's so special about your beloved? beloved? I wonder if someone asked you this morning to explain what is so special about your beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ, more than any other faith, more than any other religion.

I wonder what you would say. And you see the answers that she gives, again time has gone past and I can't go into it in detail. From verse 10 on to verse 16, she explains the beauties of her beloved.

And although she explains them again metaphorically in physical terms, each one of them has a spiritual term. There is a warning here in the covenant relationship that exists between Christ and his church, between you and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[36 : 08] There is a warning about periods of coldness. But yet you notice what the effect of that period of coldness, what the effect of the excuses, what the effect of our sleep were.

on the bride. She sought him even more desperately. And that sometimes is the effect that a period of coldness, it should be the effect that a period of coldness has on the believer.

That you and I seek the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit even more desperately. We want to re-establish our fellowship and our communion with them.

That is why at times in the experience of the believer that the presence of the Spirit may be withdrawn. Someone else pointed out and put it this way and said, oh, if we had the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ 100%, 100% of the time, you and I couldn't stand it.

we wouldn't be able to cope with it because there we would see what we see at the beginning of the chapter in verse 1, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk.

[37 : 47] How often do we see the sweetness of the honeycomb used in Scripture as a figure of the presence of the Spirit? and yet we also see the wine of the sacrament, the milk of the Word.

Perhaps we are not yet ready to cope with the full presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why you and I are often referred to as saints in the process of sanctification.

It is still a process. It is a process that will not finish until we are taken into the heavenly spaces, until we move from this life into the next life.

And there we shall see him as he really is and enjoy his fellowship and his presence in a way that is perhaps even unimaginable to us now.

that is what song is all about. It is about the fellowship and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of Christ for his church, that he loved his church so much that he gave himself as a sacrifice, that the blood was shed to make atonement at the cross.

[39 : 25] Remember that word, atonement? Break it down. At one meant with God to find peace with God.

That's what the atonement is all about. That's what the covenant relationship between Christ and his church is all about. God, but its full fellowship is still to come, is still to come when we are brought to our heavenly home.

that is the promise, that is the hope of every believer. And perhaps you're here this morning and you don't have this hope.

Perhaps you're here this morning and you didn't really understand anything about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for his church. It doesn't mean anything to you.

well, take hope because everyone who has come to faith went through a similar period of time where they had no interest in the things of God.

[40 : 45] But if you pray, if you meditate, and if you ask God to really open the meaning of the cross and his word to you, the promise we are given in scripture is that he will answer.

Let us pray.