

The Believer's View of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back to the Song of Solomon, and you'll find it on page 596, page 596, that's Song of Solomon, chapter 2.

Let me just take up the reading, that verse 2, we'll just read verses 2 and 3.

Like a lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters. Like an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. And I want to think about this for a wee while this evening, in terms of the believer's view of Jesus Christ.

Now, earlier on today, we were looking at a wee bit of background on the best way to understand the book of the Song of Solomon.

[1 : 40] Or, literally, it is in the original, the Song of Songs. And we made a case for understanding, not just on the view of the synagogue that was taken up by the early church, but more particularly on the Saviour's own use of the term, the Bridegroom, for himself.

And also, John the Baptist's reference to Jesus, the Christ, as the Bridegroom. And Jesus talked about himself like that, and he talked about his people as the friends, or those loved by the Bridegroom.

Elsewhere, the Bride. And therefore, we're simply taking what we've read there in Song of Songs, chapter 2, verse 3, as a reference to the believer's view of the Bridegroom, namely, Jesus Christ. We know that Scripture was given by God himself through the Holy Spirit. We know that it is the eternal word of the eternal God.

And it's always relevant. In every age, it is relevant. And therefore, it's important to feel comfortable when we come to the word, that there's something here that means something to us, that's relevant to us to this day.

[3 : 19] And the very understanding that we put forward, namely, that it is about the Bridegroom, the Messiah, Jesus himself, and his Bride, here described as the Shulamite.

This is something that is ever relevant. The teaching in it has to do with the spiritual relationship between the Bridegroom himself and his Bride.

And so it is something to say to us. There is this familiar figure that the Holy Spirit has put here for us. On the one hand, the excellence of Christ, the beauty of Christ, and also the excellence and the beauty, in a lesser way, of the Bride of his people.

But here in this passage, the focus is the Bride looking at the Bridegroom, the church looking at her Saviour.

And in looking at him, we see his surpassing excellence. And it's put under a vivid, meaningful figure in those days in the land of Israel.

[4 : 36] Like an apple tree or a citron, among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons of men understood.

I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. And so what we want to do here for a wee while this evening is to reflect on this verse and see that being a follower of Jesus, being part of the Bride, being among that member that will constitute the Bride of Christ at last.

There's more to being a follower than simply an acquaintance with the doctrines, with the head knowledge. And it's important for us that we simply don't rest on what we know about him, but that we go on to experience him in the Word and in our daily lives.

That's what is being said here. The speaker knows him. Not just about him, but knows him.

He is, in comparison with the apple tree or the citron, which is in a cross of its own among all the trees of the wood, and so is my beloved, so is the Saviour among the sons of men.

[6 : 17] I sat down in his shade with great delight. There's feeling here, there's emotion here, there's experience of him. And it's important for us, therefore, not to rest in our head knowledge, however accurate that head knowledge is, but to know in our soul Christ dealing with us and giving us the kind of experience of himself we need.

We were singing in that psalm, Psalm 107, verse 9, that he satisfies the soul that is longing, and with goodness he fills the hungry soul.

And if that means anything, it means we experience him in a real and meaningful and affecting way. So the Spirit says in the Word to us, this is the way to go, this is the view to have of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And may he bless the world as we look at it. Two things we want to think about in particular. First of all, the excellence of Jesus Christ.

And we look at that under three areas. Hopefully my voice will stay with me. First of all, the excellence of his appearance. And the figure is here before us, whether it's the apple tree or as many think, the citron tree.

[7 : 55] The tree that's described is a part, is in a class of its own, among all the trees of the wood. It is something utterly different.

It is excellent. And that's what the writer says here. So is my beloved among the sins.

He's in a class of his own. I'm sure I've told you more than once the wee story about the Hebrew teacher in Glasgow.

When I asked her to translate for me Psalm 45, verse 3, she said of the person described, he is more beautiful than human beings.

And I remember telling you that that psalm has to do principally with the glorious King, Messiah, with Jesus.

[8 : 59] He is more beautiful than human beings in a class of his own. Lovely in his moral and spiritual perfection.

His beauty sets him apart. And says a writer, like the apple tree among the trees of the woods or the citron, this is in a class of its own.

He says, my beloved is like this. There's something about him that's altogether beautiful.

And it's something we learn from in the psalm. My beloved is altogether beautiful. He is attractive in his words and actions.

And when you meet him in the Gospels and when you interact with him in the Word, this is what happens. We experience the beauty of Jesus in the Word.

[10 : 01] The Spirit takes that Word and brings it home to us. And we see him and experience him as full of grace and truth.

We had, back in the communion there, we had these passages from Philippians 2. The opening section and the next section after it.

And it was all about the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. His readiness to make no account of himself for us.

And when you interact with that, when you meet him there, you remember there's a reference to him in the upper room, laying aside his outer coat and taking the towel and wrapping himself and washing the disciples' feet.

You have him just indicating what it's about to serve. Making no account of yourself. How could the Lord of the universe, who knows its every corner, so to speak, who knows its every atom, how could he, as man, do such a thing, such a menial thing?

[11 : 23] But you see, when the Spirit touches us with the Word, we see it as a beautiful thing. It attracts us. If we have a spiritual mind, it draws us.

It makes us want to be more like him. That's the whole point. We see beauty attractiveness in him. We see that he is full of grace and truth. He is fairer than the sons of men.

But his fairness is not just about his dazzling splendor, as was seen on the holy mountain, but in his readiness to stoop down and help us.

He touched the leper. He had compassion in those who were ugly in their sin, who weren't worth bothering with, according to the religious leaders.

[12 : 33] But he was in there and helping them. How can this man, if he's sent from God, if he's a holy man, if he's a true prophet, how can he sit and eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And you see, when the Spirit of God touches us with the Word, we are attracted to Jesus. We're not repulsed by him stooping down like that.

We're drawn. We see this is the way we should be ourselves. In fact, even his very words had that attractiveness to them.

There's a wonderful passage there in John's Gospel in chapter 6. It is when the Jewish authorities sent their soldiers, the temple guards, to go and get him and take him back so they could deal with him.

Do you remember they came back without him and the Jewish authorities scolded them? Where is he? Why haven't you taken him back to us? And their answer was simply, never did any man speak like this man.

[13:52] And we're told they marveled at him. His words impacted them. They never heard the like. That's what this means. They marveled at his gracious words.

And so in that sense, both in his words and his actions, he's in a class of his own. Like the apple tree or the citron tree, among the trees of the woods is excellent.

So is my beloved among the sons of men. Those of us who are privileged to be brought up not only on the Bible but on the shorter catechism which sets in order so very helpfully the great doctrines of the faith.

And we were answering questions about Christ exercising his office as redeemer in terms of his being prophet, priest, and king and so on.

These things are all nicely done for us, pulled together from the Bible. But they're not just to fill out heads, to make us big-headed and superior over others who don't know these things.

[15:12] They're there to help us to study him, to be touched by the reality of him as our prophet, our priest, and our king.

We are to be humbled as we think about him whose love brought him down to earth from heaven and who in his words and actions excelled in excellence and beauty.

And it's important for us to be able to say when we meet him in the scriptures that this is our testimony. That it's not just interesting, it fills us with a sense of worship makes us want to pray, makes us want to be more like him than they are.

Adore the excellence, yes, adore the beauty of his words and his actions, but it makes us want to be more and more like him.

Like the apple tree among the trees of wood, so is my beloved among the sons of men. Excellent in his appearance, excellent too in his shade, says the writer.

[16:56] Whether it is the citron tree or the apple tree, they shared this. They had thick green leaves that afforded great shade, excellent shade.

And this is such a fitting figure. It's easy to picture someone out there at 90 degrees plus somewhere in the land of Israel, and there's just that lovely tree with plenty leaves.

Perhaps you've seen one on your travels in some other country, just to get sitting down underneath it, to be shaded from the burning heat. It's easy to picture.

And that's the intention of it. And the shade that that tree affords, the weary traveler in the burning heat, is such a wonderful, helpful illustration of the Lord Jesus Christ as a shade for us.

The Bible tells us he's a shadow of a great rock in a weary land, a shelter from the storm. Actually, in that passage in Isaiah 32, I've just quoted from, the picture is, the word that's used for a storm is a consuming wrath.

[18:26] And he's that for us. He's a shade for us, a shelter for us from the consuming wrath of God. That's what Calvary is about. Among other things, making atonement, yes, but rendering propitiation for our sins, bearing the wrath of God.

He is our shade. He is our shield. and we need that protection.

Remember in Mary McShane's hymn, Jehovah Sidkenau, he talks about how, when, so he knew the Bible and he knew the doctrines, he didn't know them in his heart.

And he said, when free grace awoke me by light from on high, and legal fear shook me, I trembled to die. No refuge, nor safety in self could I see.

There was no shade there, there was no protection there. Jehovah Sidkenau, my Savior must be. And he is all that, he is an excellent shade from the burning wrath of Almighty God.

[19:50] He has borne that, he has dealt with that for those who believe. And surely too is a shadow for us, a shade for us from temptation too.

When that old serpent, the devil, lashes out at us and seeks to turn us aside, when we are wearied by the burning heat of the enemy's onslaught, he is determined to get us, where can we go but to Jesus.

He is an excellent shade for us. But that's true too if you think about it in terms of life's trials, when the storms of life beat against us, he is a shade for us.

We can go to him and speak to him and pour out heart to him. Somewhere in John Calvin, I remember, in Psalm 27, I think it is, he talks about Christ not making the trial cease, but giving us shelter in it.

And he's that, you see, he's an excellent shelter, he protects us. That's where we're at in Isaiah 25, it's full of that, what he is by way of a shade for us.

[21 : 29] I sat down in its shade, but notice you see what it says, if you're watching your Bible, you said the minister made a mistake there, and so he did.

Because it doesn't say, I sat down under its shade, look what it says, I sat down in his shade, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

The picture of the apple tree or the citron tree is simply a guide to the real stuff of this. I sat down under his shade.

I just got down there and I spoke to him as one who needs to be sheltered from the enemy and from the storms of life.

and where better can we go to get a clearer look at life in this world with all that deludes and all that attracts people away from Christ.

[22 : 48] Where better to get a clear look at it than in Christ? Christ, I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

And that's the third thing, the excellence of his fruit. the citron is the favorite one among interpreters because of the refreshing nature of the fruit, something between an orange and a lemon.

It invigorates the weary traveler. And it's used here as a suitable illustration of Christ. And if you ask a question, well what does the fruit of Christ?

It's easy to think about a lovely, juicy, refreshing fruit. To eat it and be refreshed and invigorated.

But what is the fruit of Christ?

What are we talking about here? Surely it is his person and his work on our behalf. We can talk about the wonders of his creative genius and power, wonders of his sustaining power in this universe.

[24 : 17] others. But these things are out there. When we talk about his person and work as our saviour, we're taking it right home to where it matters most.

Christ. And that's why, as I said at the beginning, it's not enough to know about this, but to feel it in our own hearts, to be exercised in our soul in tasting and seeing that he is good.

his fruit was sweet to my taste. And that brings us lastly then to the Christian's experience of Jesus.

I've really anticipated the first thing I want to say. His fruit was sweet to my taste. Notice where we're taking the second point at its starter. the Christian's experience, the believer's experience of Christ.

We're getting into experiencing him. We've thought about his excellence. Now we're thinking about experiencing him.

[25 : 49] It's my taste. It's to be your taste. most of us learned Psalm 34 off by heart.

And we know very well the verse that says, oh, taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed. And of course to taste him is to experience him for ourselves.

Like I said a moment ago, we can describe the juiciest, freshest, refreshing apple or a citron. but unless we take and taste and see, it's all pretty much out there.

But when we try for ourselves, we know. No matter how excellent the descriptive language is of the speaker, it falls far short of simply taking the fruit and trying it for ourselves.

His fruit was sweet to my taste. And notice again, it's not its fruit, it's his. It's not just the figure that we're to focus on, but him, his fruit.

[27 : 18] And he's saying to taste the beloved is a spiritual experience. It is the believer's experience. Cain, the commentator, evangelical commentator, a German he was, he put it like this, to taste is a figure of the soul's power of perception.

And he goes on to say, a man's fruits are his words and works by which the inward nature expresses itself. And when we get a grip of and we taste and see the words and works of Christ,

these are to be sweet to our taste, really.

And this takes us beyond the mere head knowledge of it, to the heart's experience, to the taste and see thing.

Trying for ourselves and delighting in what we're allowed to try. If you think about the Lord Jesus, particularly in the gospel record, which is really a pulling together of wonderful passages of Old Testament, he is sent forth in his wonderful words and in his wonderful works.

words and as we engage with his words and his works, as we ponder them and pray over them, that the Spirit brings them home to us and we say his fruit is sweet to our taste.

[29 : 11] Christ. How often for a preacher, what encourages him, when he's preaching Christ, is that the Spirit loves to bring home the truth of Christ to the people.

And we become conscious that that's exactly what Jesus said the Spirit would do. He'll take of what's mine and show it to you.

Did not our hearts burn within us, said those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they didn't know it was Jesus. Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem?

And don't you know the things that have happened there? Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God and so on. We thought he was the Redeemer of Israel, but he's gone.

And as he went down with them and talked with them, still they didn't know it was him. Their hearts burned within them because the Spirit of God was bringing home the word.

[30 : 28] They were tasting and seeing. And the fruit of the words of this man, the fruit was sweet.

to their taste. And we're to be looking for this in our own experience.

Day by day as we come to the Bible and open it, we want him to meet with us and speak to us. And we're to go on seeking him and finding him there, meeting with us in the word.

God. That's why we're encouraged to read our Bibles and to pray and to pray together and to seek assurance and so on.

That's why we're encouraged to use the means of grace. For we meet him there to know the reality of the power of his death and his resurrection life.

[31 : 31] We meet him in these things. we experience him for ourselves. And it's good for us to think about this in terms of what, at the end of a Lord's day, what have I experienced of Christ today?

What can I go home tonight with and pray over that I've seen that I never saw before? This is important.

We're not to be content to pursue the many interesting avenues there are in human experience, whether it's cultural improvement or hobbies or interests, all legitimate in their place.

But if they crowd out the most important, if they take us away from seeking to taste and see, to experience Christ, then we've gone on the wrong road.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

[33 : 09] May he give us a spiritual relish for him, and may he satisfy our souls as we were singing with his goodness. let's not stop short of experiencing him in the word, in the place of prayer, that we may grow up into him who is altogether lovely, that we may be able to say, my beloved is mine, and I am his.

Amen.