

Session 9 Dark in Heart, but Lovely to God (Song 1:5)

I. OUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH THE PARADOX OF GRACE: DARK BUT LOVELY

⁵*I am dark [in my heart], but lovely [to God], O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me, because I am dark... (Song 1:5-6)*

- A. The Bride's spiritual journey begins with a spiritual crisis common to every sincere believer, seen in her twofold confession of faith (Song 1:5). I refer to this as the "paradox of grace" because as she discovers her sin, she also knows that she is lovely to God. The Holy Spirit allows her to see her sinfulness as well as her loveliness to God. This describes a sincere yet weak believer.
- B. It is essential for our spiritual growth to see that we are lovely as we see more of our sinfulness. The combination of these two truths causes us to grow in confidence and gratitude in our relationship with Jesus.
1. Some streams in the body of Christ focus on the darkness of our heart or on how sinful we are. To emphasize this without emphasizing how lovely we are to God destroys our confidence before the Lord and produces shame driven believers. They are sincere in their repentance but are emotionally paralyzed in their relationship with Jesus by shame.
 2. We walk in the light in different measures. We are to walk in the fullness of the light that we have as God dwells in the fullness of the light that He has. As we walk in the light, God increases it so that we see more of the darkness that is in our heart. Our most sincere efforts to love God are flawed and fragile. Those who sincerely seek to obey Jesus need not fear that they will be disqualified from their calling because of weakness. We are lovely to God even in our weakness. He is tender towards us in our spiritual immaturity.
- C. Jeremiah had revelation of the depth and deceitfulness of sin in the human heart. We have a greater capacity for sin than we comprehend. No one fully grasps the depth of our unperceived areas of sin. They are below the surface like hidden fault lines before an earthquake.
- ⁹*"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)*
- ²²*...put off...the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. (Eph. 4:22)*
- D. Paul, as a mature apostle, described himself as chief among sinners. This was not an exaggerated statement with false humility. The more light we have, the more we see the darkness in our heart.
- ¹⁵*Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. (1 Tim. 1:15)*
- E. Knowledge of our weak flesh is an important aspect of the truth about who we are, although it is not the whole truth of who we are. God knows about the depth of our sin before we are saved. He does not discover our sin because we do. He is aware of it when He declares His love for us. God did not overcommit Himself to love us without first understanding the gravity of our sin.

- F. We are sometimes surprised when we sin. At such times, we can be overwhelmed with grief. We think that because we are surprised by our sin then surely God must also be surprised. If He is surprised with the new information about us, then we fear that He may want to renegotiate our relationship with Him or reconsider His love for us.
- G. To consistently grow spiritually requires that we know that we are lovely to God while we are in the process of discovering the darkness of our heart. God's motivation to love us comes from within His heart not from our promises to never fail in a given area. He does not want us relating to Him on the presupposition that we motivate Him to take an interest in us. I have seen people who, for many years, emphasize only the darkness of their heart. They are extremely sincere in their repentance. They do not enter into the enjoyment or delight that God feels for them.
- H. They do not experience "the love that is better than wine." They have a sincere heart but a closed spirit before God. A closed spirit says, "Jesus, I love You but please forgive me and do not reject me. I swear I will never do this sin again." In other words, they continually negotiate their relationship with God while they worship Him. The issue is to understand God's affections and the way in which He imparts beauty to us in the grace of God so that we can say, "I am dark, but lovely. I know I sin but You are ravished over me." This is a powerful place of confidence. It empowers us to run to God instead of from Him when we stumble.

II. WHY WE ARE BEAUTIFUL TO GOD EVEN IN OUR WEAKNESS: FOUR REASONS

- A. We received the gift of righteousness: Our loveliness comes by receiving the gift of righteousness or the same beautiful righteous garments that Jesus possesses. Sinful people are made lovely in God's sight because of what Jesus did not because of what we do.
¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus...¹⁹...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing [counting] their trespasses to them...²¹For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:17-21)
- B. We have a willing spirit: At the new birth, the Holy Spirit put a "yes" in our spirit to God. We agree to change our behavior before the change actually occurs. The "yes" in our spirit to God is beautiful to Him. Each movement of our heart to God is the work of the Spirit in us called a willing spirit. David prayed to be sustained by a willing spirit.
¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. (Ps. 51:12; KJV)

⁴¹"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt. 26:41)

- C. The nature of God’s personality: Our beauty is related to God’s emotional makeup. The very affections and passions in God’s heart determine how He feels towards us. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. It is because of the heart of the Beholder that we are beautiful to God. If God was mostly angry, we would not be beautiful in His sight by virtue of having a willing spirit. The way He views people flows out of what is in His heart. His point of view is what determines who and what is beautiful. If someone else were looking at the exact same information about us, they would not call us beautiful. God views things very differently than man does.

⁷*“Do not look at his appearance...for the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance [performance], but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7)*

⁷*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him...for He will abundantly pardon.* ⁸*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts...” says the LORD.* ⁹*“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa. 55:7-9)*

- D. Our eternal destiny as Jesus’ bride: God sees us through the lens of who we are and how we will live for billions of years in the grace of God as the enthroned Bride with Jesus. This is a significant part of who we are in God’s sight.

III. PETER’S EARLY STRUGGLES: DARK BUT LOVELY OR WEAK BUT WILLING (MT. 26:41)

- A. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Him (Lk. 22:31-34). Later that evening, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus gave Peter a significant twofold description of how the heart of the redeemed operates in God’s grace. Jesus told Peter that his spirit was willing but his flesh was weak.

⁴¹*“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mt. 26:41)*

- B. Peter stumbled because of his “weak flesh,” yet he longed to obey God with a “willing spirit.” Most Bible translations use the phrase “the flesh is weak.” However, the NIV translated “the flesh is weak” as “the body is weak.” Jesus was referring to the principle of sin operating in Peter’s heart, not his fatigue because it was late at night.

- C. What is God thinking and feeling about us when we discover the weakness of our own flesh? This is essential in understanding the grace of God. This is where the crisis of our faith begins.

IV. PETER’S DESPAIR BECAUSE OF HIS FAILURE WHEN HE DENIED THE LORD

- A. Why did Peter go fishing? He was not fishing because the apostolic team ran out of money so soon after Jesus’ death (this is only eight days after the crucifixion). They had enough money that Judas stole from the fund without being caught. They fished all night; thus, we know Peter was not fishing for recreation.

³*...Peter said...“I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We are going with you also.” They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. (Jn. 21:3)*

- B. Peter was resigning from his God-given leadership role as an apostle to return to the family fishing business. He was changing back to his former occupation. An occupation that he had been successful at before Jesus called him to apostolic leadership. Why? If he could not stay faithful to Jesus before the pressure of a young servant girl, then how would he stay faithful for a lifetime? He was saying, “I can be faithful to God as a fisherman without the added pressures of being faithful as an apostle.”
- C. He didn’t feel qualified to be an apostle. His heart was wounded by his failure in denying Jesus three times. Peter felt that he disappointed Jesus. He could not face the Lord because of this. When we feel this way, we run from God instead of to Him.
- D. In the crisis of discovering our sinful flesh, some determine that it is too painful to reach for the highest things in God if they believe they will constantly fail. As those who have a high vision to love God with all our heart, we face coming short many times. Some would rather resign once than face failing over and over. In other words, they lower their vision so they do not feel the pain of failing. It is easier to settle for living with a “second class relationship” with God than to face the pain of failure that goes with having a high vision of loving God with all our heart.
- E. Such people become accustomed to a second rate relationship with the Lord. It is not because they do not love Him any longer. It is because they cannot face relating to God with so much shame. The truth is that we do not have to live with this shame in the grace of God.
- F. They imagine that God is angry, disappointed, grieved, and even exasperated with them. They give up on walking in wholehearted obedience and devotion to Jesus and live in condemnation.
- G. Jesus asked Peter the same question, three times. He said, “Do you love Me?”
¹⁵Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon...do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” ¹⁶He said to him again a second time, “Simon...do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon...do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” (Jn. 21:15-17)
- H. When God asks us a question, it is not because God needs information. Why was God asking Peter this question? He wanted Peter to discover information about himself. The Lord already knew that Peter loved Him. But He wanted Peter to have confidence in his sincere love for Jesus. Jesus was calling Peter back into the same quality of relationship with Him that Peter had before he denied Jesus. The Lord was revealing to Peter how much he loved Jesus.
- I. The Lord was in essence saying, “Peter, You *do* love Me. In the garden eight days ago, I told you that you had weak flesh and a willing spirit. You didn’t believe your flesh was weak. You need to understand that you *do* have a willing spirit. You *do* have a ‘yes in your spirit’ to Me. I saw it in you before you stumbled. When I see you, I don’t only see your weak flesh, I also see your sincere love for Me. I saw your willing spirit when I first called you and I still see it in you.”

- J. Jesus sees our willing spirit more than we do. The Lord was breaking shame off of Peter's heart for three denials of his faith. Jesus washed his spirit with these three questions. Jesus wanted Peter to say, "I love God." Shame is broken off of Peter as he is restored to confidence in God.

V. THREE STAGES OF VICTORY

- A. First, our sincere intention to obey God: The first step to spiritual victory is our sincere desire to obey God. Our sincere intentions must be distinguished from mature attainment of obedience. Our intentions are where our victory begins. The Spirit is the author of these sincere desires (not the devil, nor our flesh). Part of how God measures and defines our life is by these intentions. He rejoices in them. Some measure their life only by their attainments, resulting in condemnation.
- B. Second, partial breakthrough yet with a continued struggle: We are victorious on a regular basis yet still war with our flesh in a particular area of our life (Rom. 8:2-13; Gal. 5:16-17).
- C. Third, substantial breakthrough with transformed desires: Our desires are dramatically changed so that we rarely even struggle in a previous area of sin (Rom. 6:14-23).

VI. THE JOURNEY TO HOLY PASSION STARTS WITH THIS TWOFOLD REVELATION.

⁵I am dark [in my heart], but lovely [to God], O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look [stare, NASB] upon me, because I am dark... (Song 1:5-6)

- A. The crisis the young bride is facing in Song 1:5 is the same crisis that Peter walked through.
1. Dark of heart (sinful desires): Our weak flesh is dark to God.
 2. Lovely to God (sincere intentions to obey Jesus): Our willing spirit is lovely to God.
- B. Throughout the Song, the Bride teaches the daughters of Jerusalem the spiritual principles of growing in passion for God. The daughters refer to those who are spiritually immature.
- C. The dark tents of Kedar speak of the darkness of the flesh. They were blackened tents that were made out of the dark skins of wild goats. This analogy was easily understood in that day.
- D. The curtains of Solomon were the white curtains in the holy place in the temple. They speak of the inward work of grace in her life. The beauty of these curtains was not seen by all in the outer court but only by the priests who could go into the holy place.
- E. She is saying, "I am like dark tents on the outside, but inside I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon in the holy place." Outwardly, people see her as the dark tents of Kedar. Inwardly, God sees that she is lovely like the white curtains of Solomon.
- F. She cries that "the sun has tanned me." In Solomon's book, Ecclesiastes, he often wrote of "living life under the sun." It means living life in the natural realm. She is speaking of the impact of being born under the sun (born in the natural weakness of sin). Natural life has impacted her and darkened her, as it has every other person born in Adam.

- G. She asks the people not to look at her and wag their head to shame her saying, “You are dark of heart.” She says, “Yes, I am human and I have sinned greatly in my life in this fallen world.”
- H. She asks them not to stare at her (v. 6). She was overwhelmed with the darkness of her heart.

VII. HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

- A. Many have sincerely repented yet lack confidence that they are beautiful to God because of what Jesus did for them and what the Holy Spirit has done in them by imparting a willing spirit.
- B. Others have seen the truth of our loveliness to God and sometimes live presumptuously by claiming God’s beauty without seeking to live in sincere repentance and wholeheartedness.
- C. The issue is how is she going to relate to God when she discovers her own sinfulness? How are you going to relate to God when you discover you have weak flesh, a dark heart? What we do in this crisis is a very important part of our spiritual life.
- D. Many run from God instead of to Him in this spiritual crisis because they misunderstand how they look to God. They make the same mistake that Peter initially made. They resign, they give up, and they get entrenched in a mindset of shame (stronghold of shame).
- E. A life of shame leads to a life of sin. If you feel dirty before God, then you will live dirty. The Lord does not want us to relegate ourselves to a second-class status. There is nothing more powerful in the earth than a woman who feels loved along with feeling clean and full of dignity. Such a woman is tenacious in love. She is powerful. God is raising up a corporate Bride that will feel clean, desired, dignified, pursued, and delighted in.