

Song of Solomon

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[0 : 01] I direct your attention this morning to the Song of Solomon chapter 5 and verse 3. The fifth chapter of the Song of Solomon and verse 3.

I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?

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This book of the Song of Solomon is a dialogue or conversation between the bride and the bridegroom and the daughters of Jerusalem.

It is one of the most remarkable parts of the word of God together with the book of the Revelation. The scriptures are very clear about their purpose.

[1 : 13] The Apostle Paul in his writing to Timothy says, All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

And we do well to take notice of that, all scripture.

Many have looked at the book of the Song of Solomon and wondered what it referred to. But you know, we don't have to go far to the book of the Revelation to see the figure of the bride and the bridegroom used there by Christ regarding his church, himself the bride and her the bridegroom.

It is a figure that is used in scripture consistently. And when we look at the figures and begin to understand something of the simplicity of the word of God, we will find that the Song of Solomon is one of the most sacred and blessed parts of the word of God.

It speaks of the relationship between Christ and his church. We have the most sacred parts of this spoken of in God's holy word.

[2 : 45] In the epistles we read the Apostle Paul writing, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined unto his wife, and they too shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery. I speak concerning Christ and his church. He uses the very figure of that marriage union to speak of the blessed union which subsists between Christ and his church when, as he concluded the Last Supper and prayed, that prayer recorded in the 17th of John, that beautiful prayer, he said that they all may be one, as thou art one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be one in us.

The union between Christ and his church is a vital bond here below which can never be broken. And we need to look closely at the reality of it.

And this book of the Song of Solomon is a very detailed account of that union between Christ and his church.

Of the relationship between the bride and the bridegroom. You may think this a very strange text this morning. It has rested with some burden upon my heart.

[4 : 21] Now, this verse is the center of the relationship between Christ and his church.

This is the bride speaking. And we will see as we come to look at this part of God's word that she is anything else but walking in paths of obedience.

and sweet submission to her God. You know, when we come to look at the figures in scripture regarding the bride and the bridegroom, we have some passages in God's word regarding his dear people.

And my mind goes to this. when we look at the figure of Christ and his church as the bride and the bridegroom, then we see the pattern of husband and wife in this world today.

It is far from scriptural. Far from scriptural. The figures here that are given in God's holy word, listen to them.

[5 : 41] wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the saviour of the body.

And therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything. In everything. And you know, when we move backwards and forwards between the figure in the world of wives submitting themselves to their husbands and of the church submitting itself to Christ, what do we see?

I believe we see this. The blessed nature of that submission of the church to Christ. it is in love. His is not a harsh submission of some military commander over his troops.

It is something vastly different. And all the blessed nature of that submission of husbands to wives and so on.

What else do we read? Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of the water by the word.

[7 : 09] Oh, how we see in Christ and his relationship with his bride though he is God the eternal God and has almighty power yet he dain to stoop to worms in this earth and raise them to be kings and priests under his father and he comes down here in love.

Have we ever a more striking example of the bride and the bridegroom and that love of Christ to his church than in the dying thief?

I've thought of it a lot lately. That thief you know when he was nailed to the cross. cursed Christ they both did we're told they did and we're told that they cast in his face that mocking suggestion thou that savest others save thyself they cast that in his face they both did it.

Now what love we see in that when that thief was brought to realise the solemnity of his situation as he entered eternity he turned to Christ and asked for mercy.

Oh what a remarkable case that was. I was in the Royal United Hospital many years ago having an operation and there was a man there with multiple sclerosis and he had to have a big operation and the doctors never thought he could possibly come through they thought his lungs would collapse under the anaesthetic but there was no way round it he had to come anyway and I was in the opposite bed to him and he's an atheist and I went and spoke to him just before he went down to the theatre my heart was drawn out in love to him he was in an impossible situation he had no God and he faced eternity and I spoke to him and pleaded with him to pray and to seek his

[9 : 35] God and he wouldn't always remember his words he said to me he said in all honesty I haven't wanted him all my life and it would be wrong to go to him now it wouldn't even be honest I've turned my back on him all my days he said I was brought up to go to Sunday school but I left everything he said in now he said I can't expect he'll ever turn to me he'll ever listen to me and I pleaded with him to ask before he went and you know I had the most remarkable thing happen he didn't ask he went to theatre he came back alive in fact he was far stronger than me we both had our operation at the same time he was far stronger than I was but the remarkable thing was this he came down walking down the ward to me and I couldn't get off my bed and we stood side by side and I said to him did you ask and I always remember his words he said no but I can say thank you oh when we look at the bride and the bridegroom and the dying thief and we see how

Christ his love and mercy is extended oh when we look at this submission why you submit yourselves unto your husbands in all things and what is this submission that is here why it is this as unto the Lord we are called to path of obedience and you know I might come to this husband and wife that have a real love and union one to the other they trust each other in all things implicit trust oh what a blessed thing that is they are able to leave everything in each other's hands with complete confidence oh what a blessed mercy that is when there is that perfect bond of trust we read in the newspapers solemnly of wives who go out with credit cards and run up enormous debts completely unknown to their husband until they find out suddenly to their sorrow they cannot trust them husbands who go out and go off with other women and their poor wives cannot trust them but all when we come to the marriage and the husband and wife all have to be enabled to trust and to bear every burden together in sickness and in health says the vows in the wedding service so death us do part it is a very ancient wedding service

I had request some years ago to go to a little village near Henley-on-Thames to take a marriage of one of my pupils in the church of England and I went to the Anglican church stood upon the altar steps and took the wedding service and they asked me to use the alternative service book and I looked in the alternative service book and started to examine the wedding service to see if it was the same as ours and you know to my absolute surprise as I traced the history of the wedding service back through the many prayer books that the church of England has had I think it's four she's had I traced it back to 1549 I discovered that the wedding service which we use here in our church is a copy of the Anglican wedding service and that is a translation of the Roman Catholic wedding service before the Reformation Cranmer did nothing but translate it into English and the beautiful vows in sickness and in health till death us do part the blessed bond and love and union between husband and wife now what we have here this morning is that union here of which this is the figure our union one to another but it speaks of a greater union between

Christ and his church and here this morning we have the bride and the bridegroom speaking to one another and we see how the bride desires the love and company and presence and union of the bridegroom and we see here and we see and this verse that rested upon my mind is in the centre of half a dozen verses which relate to the relationship between Christ and his church the bride and the bridegroom and we see here first of all the last verse of chapter 4 let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruit the bride is praying for the bridegroom to come and all when God's dear children are wrought upon by his spirit born again of the spirit of

God then they long for Christ to draw near and go with them and for them to know his presence here we have a blessed principle of truth that as husband and wife know the strength and union of one another together in life's pathway and how we see it so blessedly some I've known have been together 60 and 70 years oh how well they know each other and when there is an absence how they feel the absence I've seen some of the dear widows in our Bethesda home how they mourn the loss of their dear partners and loved ones in life they have walked with them in sweet union together now here we see in this spiritual account here the bride of Christ longing for his presence oh that he would come into his garden and she longs for his companionship and then we see the opening verse of chapter five the bridegroom

[16 : 29] Christ is speaking I am come into my garden my sister my spouse he has come and you know when we look at this blessed truth that lies here we see such a beauty in these words I am come into my garden you know he came from heaven from glory the eternal son of God the second glorious person in the trinity and he came into his garden in the incarnation when he came to Bethlehem's manger he came down here into this world for his church for her blessing blessing and benefit he came here to atone for her sins and to open the door of heaven for her to bear her sins in his body on the tree this is why he came here into this world he came with a purpose oh here we see him answering this prayer of his dear people that he would come he has come

I am come oh do you know of that coming in your own heart have you known anything of that you know there is nothing like loneliness to be alone I have lost one partner in life and I know something of the solemn rending and tearing apart of the heart there is nothing like loneliness and separation I went recently I went into Broughton where Anne Steele was born and I went to see an old lady's grave who has helped me with my researches into her life and as I entered that cemetery I saw a site there was a grave a recently opened grave and there was a young girl beside it on her knees and I went up to her and asked her if she could tell me where the grave I was looking for was she tried to find it but we couldn't but I asked her as I came back to the grave where she had been standing what was the reason why she was there alone that evening in the cemetery she said that she had just lost her loved one killed in a motorbike accident at the age of 25 innocent in the accident a drunken driver on the wrong side of the road and there he lay there and I saw such a solemn awful sight of grief they'd only been married a little while but I had such a sight of the grief and tragedy that was there the solemn nature of what separation is and loneliness and a broken heart that is only natural

I in fact sent her a copy of Anne Steele's hymns for Anne Steele lost her fiancé some time before they were married he was drowned at Ringwood but when we come to look here at the church of Christ oh how solemn to be walking in life with eternity before us alone to have no God and one day to go out into eternity and never to know him and never to be in his presence and walk in his absence and in darkness for this is the wages of sin it is death or when we come to see the work of God in the hearts of his dear people how they long as the bride of

Christ did he to know their redeemer their creator their God and to have sweet union and communion with him it is the very work of the spirit in the new birth to grant that blessed desire in the heart to know him and his divine strength and his presence and his love and his grace and to know the work that is spoken of here I am coming to my garden he has come he died on Calvary's tree that he might gather his bride to glory to be with him we read of it very blessedly in the book of the revelation who are these and whence came they these are they that came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb they know something of the blessed union of christ to their hearts and to their souls but to go further we see how the lord has answered that prayer and then we come to the second verse i sleep but my heart waketh it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh saying open to me my sister my love my dove my undefiled my head is filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the night again in scripture we read these figures constantly they appear and this one appears in the book of the revelation behold i stand at the door and knock it is spoken to one of the churches here we see the lord is speaking to his dear church open to me my sister my love my dove he is calling upon one who has an ear to hear his voice who is born again of the spirit of god not the ungodly he is working exactly as he did in his own days of his ministry when he concluded his sermons with those words he that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit says unto the churches and when we look at this word it is the voice of christ calling to his dear church who has an ear to hear and yet we see in the context here as we read it in the fifth chapter a reference to the lock there's a clear reference to the lock that this child of god the bride of christ is lying there hearing him knock and what is she doing this is where we come to our text he asks her to open that door and she says i have put off my coat how shall i put it on i have washed my feet how shall i defile she is not ready to obey him there is no trust here of implicit obedience oh i come to this you know when this word rested upon my mind tardy obedience a lack of implicit obedience

obedience the lord calls his dear people and we see it in god's holy word the most striking example is moises at the burning bush when the lord had prepared his dear servant for his life's work he had been forty years in the court of pharaoh and forty years in the backside of the desert so that he might lead his dear people out of Egypt to the court of pharaoh and through the wilderness never was a man better prepared at the age of eighty for the work the life's work that laid before him and yet what happened at the burning bush unready to go when the lord when he slew the egyptian at the age of forty he was ready to go the lord had forty more years to train him in the backside of the desert then at the age of eighty he called him to go and oh how we hear in this verse the voice of

[26 : 21] Moses God's servant unwilling to obey oh how we see here that God the bride and the bridegroom here we have a bride typical of the type of bride that is about to die I married a young couple some years ago and I gave an address about wives submitting in all things to their husbands as Christ and the church later on I heard from him that the very night they went on honeymoon she said to him it can't be all things you can't command me to commit murder so it can't possibly be all things already looking for a loophole and here what a sight we have of the bride of Christ here when he comes to call her open unto me and he speaks to her as a child of God my sister my love my dove my undefiled and what reasons does he give for opening my head is filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the night you know it speaks to us of the night of sorrow and darkness which the

Lord went through when he came here into this earth to suffer bleed and die for his dear church he never knew the night in heaven he knew it when he came into his garden into this world he came in when he came here below and was spat upon and crowned with thorns why when he came forth from the judgment hall crowned with thorns and a purple robe and Pilate said behold the man what a sight we have of the eternal son of God in that solemn night of sorrows and darkness his head filled with dew and his locks with the drops of the night oh the darkness that surrounded him and it went on from there to the cross and those hours from the sixth to the ninth hour when he walked through a night of bitter sorrows for his dear church and he calls her here in time in her heart on account of all he suffered for her to come into that precious path of obedience to follow him what does she reply her reply is cold and callous

I put off my coat how shall I put it on I wash my feet how shall I defile them it is an act of disobedience coldness lukewarmness lack of love unwilling to put herself out unwilling to move oh when we read in the book of the revelation behold I stand at the door and knock when the Lord calls to his dear children this isn't the godless world they haven't got ears to hear this is his dear church do they obey I wonder if there are any here this morning whom the Lord has been calling I lay to rest only a fortnight three weeks ago dear man of God whom I loved immensely but you know that dear man had a father who I stood by his death bed in 1960 40 years ago I stood by his father's death bed and I never forget that death bed my father was there with me and that old man said to my father

Mr. Broome he said I was exercised about coming forward to baptism 14 years ago and I never came if I get up from this bed I'll come and I remember leaving that house and my father stopped on the doorstep turned to me and said as far as I'm concerned he's baptized he never did get up the Lord took him to glory he was a godly man but oh the solemn spirit of the bride that is here she wouldn't rise she wouldn't obey and it is in the hearts of God's dear people when the Lord gives his commandments and speaks in their hearts oh how unbelief creeps in what a fearful foe is unbelief the Lord calls now

I'm a firm believer in this that we do not attend to the ordinances of God's house or follow him in the paths of obedience without a distinct commandment but what I speak of here this morning is this the distinct commandment has already come and been neglected it has been despised perhaps over many years I have every now and then in the churches God's dear people come to me and open their hearts in secret of the deep things that are on their soul and it's happened to me more than once I was at a particular church dealing with a trustee matter some years ago with about five or six trustees when we were looking at property and land and one of those trustees approached me and started to speak most unexpectedly and told me that he'd had divine commandments regarding the ordinances of God's house ten or fifteen years before and he'd neglected them and he didn't think the Lord would ever call him again that man has still not come forward and he's nearly eighty now but you know here is the bride of Christ walking in paths of disobedience but I would have you mark you see that the distrust of her

[33 : 29] God the lack of implicit obedience the lack of that implicit obedience which the Lord's commandments expect follow thou me was his word to his disciples they didn't act like Moses Moses argued with the Lord couldn't come hadn't got the strength couldn't obey now what happens to the bride here I've put off my coat how shall I put it on I've washed my feet how shall I defile him my beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door and my bowels were moved for him and we see the solemn consequences of this the Lord began to move in the heart and instead of lying there in disobedience and refusing to rise up and follow him her heart was moved he touched her heart in a particular cord of love and she rose to move but what happened then why how solemn

I rose up to open to my beloved my hands dropped with my my fingers with sweet smelling my upon the handles of lock she can unlock the door but you know there's something very sacred here this my is a figure in scripture you will know it already the wise men they gave christ gifts at his birth gold frankincense and myrrh they were figures of divine reality the gold of his godhead the frankincense the incense that related to his office as high priest of the church that fragrant incense of his intercession in the courts of heaven above what of the myrrh it related to his death it related to his death his sacred humanity and his burial this was the myrrh the significance of it was that he would die and when her hands dropped with sweet swelling myrrh

I believe what she had his locks in the night and the darkness of his path she had a sight of his death for her her heart was moved with a precious hope that he had died on her behalf and this is the significance of the precious truth that lies here and so she rose up to open to him I opened to my beloved what had happened my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone my soul failed when he spake I sought him but I could not find him I called him but he gave me no answer I watched this in God's church over many years that there are some who walk in deep silence and darkness in their souls for many years what has happened I believe this and perhaps you're like it walking and the heavens are iron and brass and your prayers are not answered what's wrong your beloved has withdrawn himself and has gone the sweet love that perhaps you knew in your youth when the

Lord first opened your heart and taught you by his spirit has all died and gone there's coldness distance lukewarmness hardness sorrow you come and go to the house of God but you don't feel any precious nature of the love of Christ and his presence with you what has happened oh how the Lord is grieved by the disobedience the unbelief of his dear people how they cannot trust him they say no I can't walk that way it's impossible I can't possibly go that way and yet the Lord requires implicit obedience poor human nature is full of unbelief when it comes to the moment to obey it sinks like

Moses did and turns away I've always thought that when Aaron spoke for Moses Moses was grieved in his heart oh if only he trusted the Lord and spoken for himself the Lord sent him you see Moses was a meek man a humble man but he did some strange things one was the solemn way in which he couldn't obey his God at the age of 80 at the burning bush and the other was when he struck the rock in anger and the Lord dealt with him on both occasions all how solemnly he knew the fruits of the path of disobedience he was never allowed to enter the promised land it was a terrible blow to him he never was allowed to do what the whole of his life's work had been to lead

[39 : 18] God's people the Lord was angry and the Lord is angry when his people do not trust him I spoke at the beginning of that blessed trust between husband and wife in everything sharing everything trusting in everything together complete confidence in one another what of our trust in our God do we put our hand into the hand of God and go out into the unknown dark do we venture on him I quoted that in prayer you know what I quoted is on the wall in West Street Chapel Croydon Francis Coble's old chapel and it's on the monument of Francis Coble venture on him venture holy let no other trust in truth none but Jesus none but Jesus none but

Jesus can do helpless sinners go do no mind goes to the old Mrs. Stone Lake who never came forward to the ordinances of God's house until she was well over 80 when both legs had been amputated she could not venture all her days and then at that great age when both her legs had been amputated through gangrene John Green baptised on a stretcher in Goward Street Chapel and she ventured in that great weakness to pass through the ordinances of God's house I cannot rise says the bride of Christ but she did rise and I have you notice this that when she sought her beloved and couldn't find him the daughters of Jerusalem asked her what is thy beloved more than another beloved and then oh in his absence as she mourned her absent God she comes out with this remarkable description of her beloved it is a beautiful description if you look at the figures of his Godhead his sacred humanity his glorious mercy and compassion to his dear church the vital foundations of the church oh our gold at the top that is divinity and gold at the bottom and oh in the centre and oh in the centre lies the glorious compassion and mercy of God and we read such things as this that his belly is bright ivory overlaid with sapphires and you know it speaks of his bowels of compassion the tender mercies of our God oh what a sight she had on it and she could truly say my beloved he's altogether lovely the chiefest among ten thousand and she longed for his presence it's a remarkable description of one who mourned his absence but there's nothing like absence to grant a precious sight of the love that exists and subsists between husband and wife and here we see the blessed nature the solemn nature of the bride of Christ walking in disobedience the text I have read this morning is the very core of her unbelief and her disobedience and her distrust of her God and yet oh the mercy of her God to bring her into the path of obedience and to bring her to trust in him at all times and to pour out her heart before him oh may you prove that

God is your refuge and that with him and in his strength all things are possible Amen