

## GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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### Longing For Christ (Song 1:7-17)

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We have studied the first seven verses of Chapter 1 of the Song of Solomon, under the title, “Desiring Christ.” The church, or the believer, desires Christ above all the attractions - above the “wine” - of the world. We have learned that the desire of the believer for Christ arises from the love of Christ for him; that it is focussed on Christ’s person; and that it is based on His redemptive work. We have also learned why we should desire Christ. There are three reasons - first, it is because Christ has made us righteous; second, it is because Christ has redeemed us from the bondage of sin; and third, it is because Christ has transformed us into new people.

We wish to develop this last point - as a transformed people, we long for Christ, who has gone to heaven to prepare a place for His people. Remember that we are betrothed to Christ and, as His bride, we await His return to take us to be with Him. Meanwhile, we long for Him, knowing that He loves us and we have been enabled to love Him. Here, we consider our longing for Christ, under two parts, each of which consisting of three main points.

#### **I. Seeking communion with Christ (vv 7-8)**

##### ***Seeking Christ in His word***

In the first part, covering verse 7-8, we have “seeking communion with Christ”. A true believer would seek communion with Jesus Christ. He wants to be with Christ, to talk to Him, and to hear what He has to say. This arises from love for Christ, who has first loved him. Christ laid down His life to save unworthy and unlovely people. He took our punishment upon Himself so that we may be spared the wrath of God. He died in the place of His people in order that they may have eternal life. We who have been spared eternal damnation from God, who have been forgiven all our sins, who have been reckoned righteous in God’s sight, love our Lord because He has given of Himself to us. We seek fellowship with Christ out of love for Him, even though we know that our love is so imperfect.

This, in fact, is a test of whether or not you are a true Christian. Often, we are asked, “Don’t you think I am a Christian?” The question shows uncertainty in the person, quite apart from the tone of defensiveness. That often arises from a wrong understanding of what it means to be a Christian. True Christianity is not about going to church, carrying a Bible on you, or using “Christian language”. True Christianity is not about what you must do, or what you must not do. Christians do behave in a certain way but, from the point of principles, that is a secondary matter. The primary thing is that he has been transformed by the power of God and, for that reason, he lives in a certain way. His behaviour is motivated by love for Jesus Christ, his Lord and Saviour. You may know whether you are a true Christian by asking if you love Jesus Christ out of a living relationship with Him. Are you trusting in Christ for acceptance before God? Are your sins forgiven by God? Are you grateful to Christ for what He has done for you? True believers love Christ because they are grateful to Him for His love. He, therefore, seeks communion with Christ.

How would a Christian seek communion with Christ? Verse 7 says, “Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed *your flock*, where you make *it* rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?” These are the words of the bride. She knows that the groom is the chief shepherd, who has many under-shepherds working for him. She would like to take her goats to feed with his flock, for she knows that he feeds his flock well, in the place of green

pasture. This is the picture of the believer desiring the word of God. It is as we feed on God's word that we are nourished spiritually. It is as we come to His word that we meet with our Saviour and have sweet communion with Him. A person who is born again would desire the word of God, in the same way that a baby would take to milk. This is one test of your love for the Lord. Do you seek Him in His word? Do you seek out His people who feed upon His word? A person who is in love will want to be near to the one he or she loves, so that the beloved's words may be heard. We love the Lord. We desire to hear His voice. We, therefore, seek out the church where the Bible is faithfully preached. His word strengthens and comforts us.

### ***Seeking Christ in the company of His people***

Next, the believer would show forth his love for the Lord by seeking Him in the company of His people. When we find His people, we want to be with them, and be part of them. We do not want to remain on the fringes, without joining the flock. The bride expresses this truth by saying, "For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?" A Christian may have many good friends who are unconverted. We value their friendship and would not despise our friends. But our ultimate company is with God's people. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are the ones who share with us the same faith in Christ, who love His word, who have the same values. Many benefits accrue from being with God's people. Fellowship strengthens our faith. Fellowship shields us from dangers which tend to befall individuals. We are able to do more in fellowship with God's people, compared to serving God alone. Let us consider each of these benefits in turn.

Fellowship edifies us. No one can live on his own for long. You may think that you have been able to live alone when, in reality, you have come out to interact with others occasionally. A woman under confinement after birth finds it hard to be isolated. It is even harder for one who is detained under one of those repressive laws still found in many countries. In such solitary confinement, you are deprived of contact with anyone, except to be taken out occasionally, at odd hours, to be interrogated. You have no access to the news, no reading or writing material, and no means of telling the time, except from the meals brought to you. Those are the tactics calculated to disorientate you and to break you down psychologically so that it is easier to extract information from you. Human beings need people around them. Those who keep to themselves are unhappy people. We are not saying that everything will be fine if you interact with people. Indeed, problems often arise, causing us much stress, heartaches and disappointments. However, as a general rule, human beings are happier when they interact with others. The person who keeps to himself will appear grim, become unhappy, and turn bitter in the heart. Conversely, fellowship between believers edifies the soul, what more with the blessing of God upon it.

Fellowship also shields us from dangers that tend to come to individuals who keep to themselves. The devil's temptation is strongly felt when one is left alone for long. It is almost like a pack of harmless zebra being hunted by a pride of lions. The lions would chase after the pack, isolate the straggling zebra, and finally pounce to kill. It is not God's will for you to live the life of faith in isolation from other believers. We are saved individually when the gospel came to us but once saved, we are meant to integrate with a local church. Otherwise, there will be no one to admonish you when you begin to go astray. You will not be able to sustain a warm zeal for the Lord for long. Like a piece of burning amber, you need others to be around you in order to burn well.

Then, fellowship helps us to accomplish more in our service to God. The Bible compares the church with the human body, which is made up of many parts - the arms, the legs, the eyes and ears. We need one another. This is especially true in an age when so many things require specialized knowledge. It is impossible to do everything well just by yourself. Even if you are very talented, you will not be able to accomplish quite as much as when you work together with others in the church. So, fellowship is essential not only for your own good, and not only for your own protection, but it is also in order to be positively useful. That being the case, it is unthinkable that we should isolate ourselves and not be integrated with a good church somewhere.

The Lord has promised to be present where two or more of His disciples are gathered in His name. He will be found where His people are gathered to worship Him. When you find a good church, do not remain on the fringes, observing all that is happening while being left out. It is such a pity that you should feel unwanted, sad, and marginalised when all you need to do is to be joined to the church.

Imagine a child lost in the crowd, who seeks out the parent on hearing his or her voice. The child comes near but still cannot see the parent, who is hidden by the crowd around him. It would be a happy ending if the child is finally reunited with the parent. But what if the parent moves on, calling out for the child, not knowing he was so near? You do not want to be in the midst of people who love the Lord, who have the word of God faithfully preached in their midst, who are so filled with joy in the Holy Spirit, and yet not be part of them. We are talking about joining the church as a believer. But the same principle applies in salvation. Before joining the church, you need to be saved. You do not want to come right to the gates of heaven, and yet remain outside it. Why remain outside the banquet hall, when you could have come in to join the feast? Why know the way of salvation in Jesus Christ, and yet not trust Him to save you?

### ***Response from Christ***

We are to seek communion with Christ through His word, and in the fellowship of His people. What may we expect as we do that? Christ will draw near and begin to commune with us. We are seeking Him in the right way, in the right place. His word will begin to speak to us, and we will begin to sense His presence in the company of His people. Verse 8 says, “If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock...” We note, here, how Christ looks upon the church. The church sees herself as unworthy of the love of the Lord for, she said, “I am dark... the sun has tanned me... my mother’s sons were angry with me... my own vineyard I have not kept (verse 5-6).” This, as we have seen, was the state of the believer before he was saved. He was unlovely, miserable and unable to improve his own situation. But things changed when Christ came to seek him out, to call him to Himself, and to clothe him in His own righteousness. The believer is washed clean in the blood of Christ, and forgiven all his guilt by God the Father. He becomes a member of the kingdom of God, a member of the body of Christ. He is loved by Christ, for Christ loves His people - the church. The church is addressed as “fairest among women”, showing that the believer is well-loved by Christ. The world may continue to despise us, or to think nothing of us, but we are precious in the sight of Christ.

It is no wonder that Christ will draw near to the believer who seeks for Him. His direction to His people is, “Follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds’ tents.” Go where the sheep have gone, follow after the well-trodden paths. Do not go where the wolves and the lions are found. Keep to the time-tested paths of past generations of Christians. We are reminded of the words of Jeremiah 6:16, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.”’ There is only one good way, namely the way of “salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone”. Earlier generations of Christians have sought the Lord and found Him. We do not need the novel ways invented by the present generations of ill-taught Christians. We want to follow the old paths of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We want the old paths of Moses, Samson, and the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. We want to follow the paths of the Reformers and the Puritans. We believe that they have found the good way of salvation, and of communion with the Lord. We will find the Lord by following where the Lord’s sheep have trodden.

We will bring our little goats to feed beside the shepherds’ tents. We will bring our friends and relatives, our neighbours and colleagues, to the places where the word of God are faithfully expounded by His servants. Yes, in an age of apostasy, there are still faithful preachers and faithful churches to be found. We will go to hear the word of God in such churches, from such preachers. We do not want to expose our unconverted friends to the entertainment and the wrong teachings found in so many churches that have gone astray. Rather, we want them to hear God’s word faithfully expounded. There, the Lord will meet with them, and transform at least some of them from goats into sheep. There, we will meet our Lord and be refreshed by Him.

## **II. Entering into communion with Christ (vv 9-17)**

### ***Assurance from the Lord***

Under “Seeking communion with Christ”, we learn that we must seek Him in His word, and we must seek Him in the company of His people. As we do so we expect Him to meet with us. We move on to the second part, which is “Entering into communion with Christ”. The Lord not only draws near to give us directions how to find Him, but He comes to meet with us spiritually. The first thing He does is to assure us that we are precious in His sight. It says, in verses 9 to 10, “I have compared you,

my love, to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold." This is the Lord's assessment of His people: they are beautiful, precious and of great worth. Solomon used to trade in chariots and horses with Egypt. We read in 1 Kings 10:28-29, "Also Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king's merchants bought them in Keveh at the *current* price. Now a chariot that was imported from Egypt cost six hundred *shekels* of silver, and a horse one hundred and fifty; and thus, through their agents, they exported *them* to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria." Solomon traded only in the best horses which were of special breed to pull the chariots in war. The horses were decorated with ornaments and gold chains hung around their necks. The leather straps around them were decorated with gold and silver studs. The chariots could be regarded as equivalent to the tanks of today. They were highly valued in battle. Just as you would buy a car that is good, safe and of high quality, the chariots and horses had to be of high quality. So, what is being said of the bride is that she is lovely, of great worth, and highly valued.

We have seen how Christ's blood cleanses His people of all sins, and how His righteousness imputed upon them is the basis of God's acceptance of them. God looks upon His children as lovely in the righteousness of Christ. Furthermore, the fruit of the Spirit is seen more and more in their lives - fruit such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These qualities adorn the lives of God's children, making them attractive, even to the unconverted around them. Added to these are the various gifts or talents bestowed upon believers to make them useful in God's service. You see now how believers are looked upon as truly precious in the Lord's sight. Here, it is not the perception of believers concerning themselves, but what Christ perceived them to be. The words of Christ come to us with such power to comfort and assure us.

### ***Engaging in personal devotions***

We come to the second point under this second part of our message. Christ has assured us of His acceptance as we draw near to Him. We now pray to Him, remembering that He is in heaven, and we are on earth. Of course, He is with us by His Spirit, but our Saviour, the God-Man, is in heaven. The King is in His palace, waiting to return and take us to be with Him. Meanwhile, we prepare ourselves for our wedding day - the day of the Lord's return. Every bride will beautify herself for her wedding day. How do Christians prepare themselves for Christ's return? We do so by engaging in deep personal devotions. Here, the bride beautifies herself with a fragrant oil called spikenard. This is the symbol of the prayer of believers, which rises up to heaven. In the Old Testament, herbs were added to the animal sacrifices to produce an aroma which rose up to God in heaven. Today, we do not offer up animal sacrifices, for Christ has offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice for His people. We may, therefore, draw near to God in prayer based on the finished work of Christ. We also sing praises to our Lord, which is our act of devotion to Him. Do you pray often? Do you sing praises to the Lord?

We also engage in meditation in our personal devotion. A lover who misses her beloved will think of him much. Since we love our Lord, we think of Him much. We can think rightly of Him only if we have biblical views of Him. We need to read the word of God, hear the word preached, and ponder upon the truths of Scripture often. Scripture points us to Christ, showing us His attributes, and telling us what He has accomplished for us. It reminds us of His many promises to His people. We meditate on these things. This is pictured by the bride keeping a bundle of myrrh on her breast, which indicates closeness to her heart. We know that the myrrh tree produced a gum which was bitter to the taste but had a pleasant fragrance. It was used in liquid or solid form. The bride seems to have put some myrrh gum in a cloth pouch which she hangs around her neck. That way, she is constantly reminded of her beloved, even when she is falling asleep at night. Night is the time of rest from the day's activities. It represents the time of leisure that we have, even though it might not be literally night yet. It can also represent the times of sorrow, disappointment, and bleakness. We long for the presence of our loved one at such times. Such is the love of the bride for the groom. Do you love the Lord? Do you spend time meditating on Him?

Meditating on our Lord helps us to see things in perspective. We are told in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things *are* true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things." We are often burdened and stressed out by the things that happen to us. We are unable to sleep well, with the result that it

shows on our faces. Disappointments from interactions with people cause such stress that sleep eludes us. This is when we must learn to commit everything to our Lord. This is when meditation on things that are true, noble, and pure will help us. The Lord knows our situations, He knows what we are facing, and He cares about us. We must learn to meditate on these truths. We must think much of Him.

We pray to our Lord and praise Him. We meditate on Him, especially at night - whether it is literally night or when we are downcast. There is a third way we exercise our personal devotion - we worship and serve our Lord. The bride is now in the vineyards of En Gedi. We are told, in verse 14, "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna *blooms* in the vineyards of En Gedi." En Gedi was located in the territory of Judah. It was a well-watered place, whose fertile vineyards produced good grapes. We are told, in Chapter 8, verse 11, "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins." King Solomon was a rich land owner, who leased out his vineyards. Vineyards speak to us of our service to God. In the Gospels, the Lord often refers to vineyards in His parables. The parables show how we are to serve God and worship Him. Today, it is quite common to refer to our sphere of service to God as a "corner of God's vineyard". Missionaries serve in various corners of God's vineyard. Each of us has a corner of God's vineyard to serve in. How important it is to maintain a missionary spirit, even though we are not missionaries in the normal sense of the word! We may each have our own vocation - our own calling in life - but we must make sure that we live for our God, and to His glory.

In church, we worship our God and serve Him in various ways. There are times when we grow weary in our service to Him. Setbacks occur, and disappointments are experienced. Controversies and schisms affect God's people severely. At such times, our feelings are soothed by the remembrance of Christ and His death for us whenever we have the Lord's supper. We are reminded of, and even rebuked by, our selfishness and narrow perceptions of the problems we face, in the light of what the Lord has done for us. Whenever there is a baptism, our hearts are lifted up to realise that souls are being saved, and the Lord's work is going on, despite our human frailties and lack of faith. The Lord's supper and baptism are the "henna blooms" that grow beside the rows of vines in the vineyard that we serve in. They refresh our souls and remind us of the Lord's mercies to us. But the "henna blooms" may be something else - they may be answers to prayer, or unusual providences, or a strong sense of the Lord's presence in the midst of difficulties and trials, or when we are weary in our service to God. These are tokens of the Lord's love for His people in their times of need.

You see now the acts of personal devotion we engage in: they include prayer and praise to our Lord, meditation upon Him and His word, and persevering service in the sphere of service He has given to each of us. We have covered two main points under this second part of our message - assurance from the Lord and engaging in personal devotions. We come to the third, and last, point under this part, namely, revelling in Christ's love.

### ***Revelling in Christ's love***

The interaction between the believer and his Lord appears remote and alternating, at first, as though the conversation is through the telephone line: one speaks while the other listens, the other speaks and the one listens. It then becomes more intimate and interactive, as though the two parties have met face to face, and are now enjoying each other's presence. This is to be expected in our relationship with our Lord. As we seek communion with Him, we soon enter into communion with Him. As we draw near to the Lord, the Lord draws near to us. In verse 15, the groom now says, "Behold, you *are* fair, my love! Behold, you *are* fair! You *have* dove's eyes." We have seen how the Lord loves His people and regards them as beautiful, although the world does not appreciate them. We have been reminded time and again that this is due to the grace of God, shown to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ has done everything needful to make us righteous in God's sight. We have been blessed with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. We are precious to the Lord.

Now, the Lord affirms His love for His people. The groom tells the bride that she is beautiful. He repeats His praise, showing that He means what He says. It also shows that He finds satisfaction in the bride. Her eyes are singled out for mention. He says, "You *have* dove's eyes." This tells us two things, namely that the eyes are bright, and they are gentle. The brightness of intelligence is seen in the

believer because he or she is enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand Scripture. Many are those who read God's word but do not understand the spiritual meaning. They think they have understood, but theirs is an academic or intellectual understanding of the words they have read. However, when the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind, the word of God affects his soul. It stirs his inner self, and brings conviction of spiritual realities. The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the time he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has a spiritual understanding of God's word when he reads, or hears, it.

Then, the "dove's eyes" speak of the docility, or gentleness, of spirit in the believer. The dove is different from the eagle, which is a bird of prey. Look at the eyes of an eagle, and you will see that there is a certain aggression in the creature. It is as though the bird has no fear of others, and it is ready to pounce on its prey. Some individuals may have eyes that appear to be fierce, cunning, and even cruel. However, we are not dealing with looks but with the character of the person. If we were to judge a person by mere external looks we might be wrong in our judgement. Furthermore, God's Spirit can transform any rough character such that when we meet him, we know that he is a trophy of God's grace. He is a believer who shows forth the graces and gifts of the Spirit in his life. We are humbled by the works of grace in the life of individuals. We, in the first place, did not deserve the love of God, much less the salvation He has given to us. Yet that is the truth - God has saved us, and we are well loved by Him. Here, the Lord expresses His love for His people. We are reminded of the words of Isaiah, concerning the coming Saviour: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied..." (Isa. 53:10-11).

It is to be expected that the believer will respond to the Lord. He loved us first, and continues to love us, so that we are able to love Him. The believer expresses his love by praising the Lord for His loveliness, and by appreciating the blessings that come from Him. The bride says, in verse 16, "Behold, you *are* handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant!" If you check up on the word translated "handsome", you will find that it is the same word translated "fair" in verse 15. The Lord is fair, or beautiful, in His person, character, and works. We know that our Lord is far fairer than us, and we praise Him for who He is and what He has done. He is the glorious Son of God who came to this world to pay the heavy price - of laying down His life - to save us from our sins.

We also praise the Lord for the things we enjoy, by grace, with Him. The end of verse 16, and verse 17, read, "Also our bed *is* green. The beams of our houses *are* cedar, *and* our rafters of fir." The word translated as "bed" should really be "couch". The couch was where the host of the house would lean on to entertain friends and have a meal together. As Christians serve their Lord, in fellowship with other Christians, the Lord Himself draws near to them. He will fulfill His promise to be in the midst of His people when two or more of them are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20). The "green" of the couch can mean one of three things: it can mean that its colour is green, or it is made of young wood, or it is flourishing with vitality. The last of these suits the context best. Like a tree that is green, our service to the Lord in fellowship with one another is flourishing, expanding, and growing with vitality. You see now how much you are missing by not serving the Lord in fellowship with other Christians. You might think that you are keeping up well in the faith, and being useful in the Lord's service in some ways, but you are actually missing out on the special blessing of the Lord while working alone.

Next, we must note that the word "houses" is as it should be, according to the original Hebrew. Some versions of the Bible translate the word in the singular, "house", which is not quite right. This is to show that there are many spheres of service that we are involved in while on earth. Furthermore, we are connected with other believers in *their* spheres of service. We know that it is never good to be involved in everything and, in the end, being unable to accomplish anything well. We do not want "to have a finger in every pie", as the saying goes. We must know the areas of service God want us to be in. We must know our gifts, and have a sober assessment of our abilities. Having said that, it remains true that our lives are brightened by the many facets of God's work on earth. We are enriched by our involvement in the ministries of other Christians. This, also, is an anticipation of the glories of heaven. Life in heaven will not be monotonous and boring. Instead, there will be much that enriches and excites us there. The Lord says, "In My Father's house are many mansions..." (John 14:2). The

word “mansions” is in the plural, meaning many rooms, or better, apartments. If we take the Father’s house as heaven, we may say there are many dwelling places, separate houses, everywhere. Each of us will have our own sphere of service in heaven, at the same time that we interact, and are enriched, by the spheres of service of other believers.

We come back to our service on earth. The “houses” we share with the Lord have beams of cedar, and rafters of fir. The cedar beams show that the houses are big and spacious. They are able to hold much, and much can be done under their roofs. The rafters of fir show that the houses are permeated with the fragrance of the wood. This is to indicate that we will be refreshed constantly as we serve the Lord. More specifically, we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what is right and pleasing in God’s sight. There will be many gospel successes, and we will be able to say often, “The Lord has been with us!”

### **Conclusion**

Let us review what we have learned. In the first part of this message, we learn that we must seek communion with the Lord. We seek communion with Him in His word, and in the company of His people. As we do so, we expect the Lord to respond by giving us instructions, and by encouraging us to draw near to Him. In the second part, we learn of what it is like to enter into communion with Christ. The Lord will draw near to us to assure us of His presence and His love for us. We will be induced to engage in personal devotions - by prayer and praise, by meditation upon Him and His word, and by acts worship and service. We will then be caught up in the love of Christ, exchanging praises and assurances with Him.

There may be much trials and sorrow in the world, but what does it matter if the Lord loves us and is with us? We will continue to stay close to our Lord and serve Him, for in so doing we find a sense of purpose and fulfilment in life. We are storing up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Let us long for our Lord who is in heaven. Let us seek Him while we are on earth. Let us commune with Him in private devotion as well as in active service.

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