

GOSPEL HIGHWAY

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God's Seal Of Assurance (Song 3:6-11)

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We are studying the Song of Solomon, a book of spiritual allegory concerning the relationship between the Saviour and His people. Although written by King Solomon long before the Saviour, Jesus Christ, came to this world, the book was inspired by the Holy Spirit and has been preserved for our learning and edification.

We have seen that Chapter 3 may be divided into two parts. In the first part, consisting of verses 1-5, we have "Assurance Lost And Regained". We have learned that it is possible for us to have a genuine assurance of our own salvation. This salvation is primarily based on the teaching of God's word, and secondarily on the sense of salvation given to us by the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer. Of the two, the first, or objective, aspect of assurance takes the primacy, while we do not undervalue the second, or subjective, aspect which is an inner certainty which the Holy Spirit gives to our spirit. We also have learnt that our assurance can be weakened, and even lost. The causes of this include sinful habits, neglect of God's word, disobedience to God's commands, bodily exhaustion, and the attacks of the devil. But one common cause singled out for consideration is indolence on the part of the believer. Laziness and a careless attitude drive away the Saviour from our lives. We must bestir ourselves to regain a sense of His presence. The way to do so is by searching for Him in the word of God, in the company of God's people. Once we find Him, we must recommit our lives to Him, repenting of our sins. And we must maintain the spiritual peace and communion we have with our Saviour.

God expects us to do something about our backslidings and sins. When we begin to do something to put things right, we will discover that God has been watching over us and leading us to Himself. He provides watchmen, spiritual helpers, to guide us. The Lord is ready to forgive us and to welcome us into His presence. More than that, He takes the initiative to assure us of His love for His people. This is what we find in Chapter 3:6-11, from which we learn of "God's Seal of Assurance". There are two sections to this message: God's promise of salvation (vv. 6-8), and God's provision of salvation (vv. 9-11).

I. God's promise of salvation to the church (vv. 6-8)

The bridal party

We begin with verses 6-8, which concern God's promise of salvation to the church. The picture given to us is that of a watchman watching on the city walls. The city is Jerusalem, as will become clear in the later verses. As the watchman scans the horizon, he sees some people approaching. Are they friends or foes? The people are approaching fast and with determination, with the horses kicking up dust. The watchman asks himself, in the words of verse 6, "Who *is* she coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke...?" We have deliberately changed the word "this" to "she" because, in the original Hebrew, the word is feminine and conveys the idea of a female person. It seems that the watchman discerns a lady in the centre of the group of people, seated in a carriage, and is being escorted by many valiant men. If he cannot see the lady directly because the carriage is covered over, he must have drawn that conclusion by some means such as from the colour of the carriage and from the ladies-in-waiting who accompany the carriage. This is actually the bridal party.

In this book, Solomon is the groom, who represents the coming Saviour. Solomon is a type, or symbol, of Christ. The bride, the Shulamite woman who is betrothed to him, represents the church, i.e.

the people of God. Sometimes, the church is looked upon as an individual, viz. the bride, and at other times the church is represented by a group of people, viz. the daughters of Jerusalem. In verse 6, the church is represented by the group of people coming out from the wilderness, and heading for the city. Here is the scene of people being called out from their lives of sin and misery. This group of people is heading for Jerusalem, where the groom is waiting. They come with such energy, and such determination. They represent the church - the redeemed people of God - being energised by Christ, moving towards heaven with excitement and enthusiasm. In short, this is the picture of sinners being called out by the gospel to trust in Christ for salvation, during the present age.

As the watchman watches intently, the cloud of dust reminds him of the smoke that constantly rises at the temple in the city. In the time of Solomon, the Jews worshipped God by bringing animal sacrifices. The person would place his hand on the head of the animal to show, symbolically, that his sins were being transferred to the animal, which was then slaughtered and offered up to God on the altar. This was to acknowledge that the worshipper deserved death in God's hand because he had broken God's law. The animal was sacrificed in the sinner's place, and its blood was shed to cleanse him of his sins. The life was in the blood, so that the shedding of blood was the laying down of its life. By the death of the animal, the worshipper was spared death. The punishment he deserved from God was deemed to have fallen on the animal instead. In that way, the sinner was accepted by God. All this was to show that, one day, the Saviour would come to lay down His life for His people. When the time arrived, the Son of God came to take upon Himself perfect human nature so that, as God and Man in one Person, He was able to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for His people. Those who repent of their sins and trust in Christ for salvation are regarded as righteous by God because their sins have been paid for by Christ while Christ's righteousness is regarded as theirs. This is imputation - the believer's sins are imputed to Christ, while Christ's righteousness is imputed to them. In the Old Testament, this was shown by the constant offering of animals on the altar which sent columns of smoke up to God.

As the watchman looks and is reminded of the smoke from the burnt offerings, he is reminded also of the smoke that rises from the altar of incense within the temple. We are told, in verse 6, "Who *is* this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense..." In those days, the altar was directly in front of the curtain that divided the sanctuary from the Most Holy Place. Incense and oil were sprinkled on the altar to produce a sweet smelling fragrance that rose up to God. The main ingredient of the incense was frankincense, which was made from the gum of a tree. This was the offering of the sinner who had been forgiven by God. So, a sinner sought forgiveness from God through the burnt offering in the outer court of the temple, and then entered the sanctuary to make offerings of thanksgiving at the altar of incense in the sanctuary. This was a picture of how sinners were going to be saved, to worship and serve God in the New Testament age. Believers are able to worship acceptably only because their sins have been paid for by Christ's death on the cross, and their prayers and praises are made perfect by Christ's intercession for them in heaven.

The fragrance of the incense in turn reminds the watchman of the perfumed powders brought by the merchants: "Who *is* this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?" Merchants in the Old Testament speak to us of foreigners. Israel was at the crossing point of many trade routes, with merchants coming and passing through from the north, the south and the east. Merchants also came by way of the sea from the west. We are reminded of the Ishmaelites to whom Joseph was sold by his brothers. Here is a characteristic of the bridal party - there is an obvious international flavour in the way the people dress, showing that the party is made up of people from various places. This would be an additional reason why the watchman is reminded of the merchants. What is described here is to show that the church of Jesus Christ would be made up of people from all over the world, who are called out by the gospel. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the gospel is being proclaimed to all nations.

The way of salvation

As the entourage gets nearer the focus is shifted to the carriage that carries the bride, which is a picture of the way God saves His people. We are told, in verse 7, "Behold, it *is* Solomon's couch, *with* sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel." The carriage actually belongs to King Solomon. He is the one who has sent the carriage, and the warriors, to fetch the bride from the wilderness. This would have been obvious to any onlooker for there would have been a flag bearing the royal insignia - a flag

showing who the party of people belong to. This was the practice in many parts of the world. In ancient China, security firms used to escort those who hired them by carrying banners indicating who they were. Robbers would be fool-hardy to attack any well-known firms, which were manned by *kungfu* experts. Spiritually speaking, this is to show that our salvation is accomplished by Christ's death on the cross. Without the atoning work of Christ, there would be no salvation for anyone. We owe our salvation to Christ, who has done everything needful to save sinners. Those united to Him by faith are being brought safely to heaven. Christians are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). We are only passing through this world, heading for our eternal home. Our safety is guaranteed by our Lord, who provides the "valiant warriors" to escort us.

Who are "the valiant of Israel" who escort Christ's people through their pilgrimage in this world? They are the preachers of the gospel, the pastors and teachers of the word of God. They wield "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). The word of God guides us and warns us of dangers to our faith. The word of God feeds us and strengthens us so that we are able to fight temptations and sins, and serve God effectively. There are sixty valiant men accompanying the bride, showing that our Lord has supplied the full and adequate number of helpers to help us in our spiritual pilgrimage. The number sixty is equivalent to 6×10 , where 6 is the number representing man, while 10 represents the completeness in God. So, what is being portrayed to us is that the Lord has equipped the church with all the necessary helpers. These helpers - the preachers of God's word - use the word of God, which is sufficient to guide and help us in our Christian life and in our service to God.

The warriors remind us of David's mighty men, recorded in 2 Samuel 23. These men did great exploits and became famous in their own rights. Some were more famous than others. David was surrounded by such mighty warriors. No wonder he was such a powerful king and accomplished so much. Through the centuries, the Lord has raised up mighty men to fight the enemies of the church. They were spiritual warriors who used the word of God to fend off the attacks of the enemies. Men like Irenaeus and Tertullian were instrumental in countering the errors of Gnosticism, which among other things, claimed that matter is evil while the spirit is good. Athanasius was raised up by God to counter the error of Arianism, which taught that God is absolutely one, and Jesus Christ is the highest of God's creatures. During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, God used Martin Luther and John Calvin to recover key doctrines of the Bible, without which we would have lost crucial biblical doctrines such as salvation, the sovereignty of God, and the sole authority of the Bible. In the days of C. H. Spurgeon, he was used by God to defend the truth against the inroads of Liberalism. There have been others less well known, but each has been used by God to defend the truth and to strengthen the church. There have been many missionaries who went out to preach the word of God. We know of some like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and David Brainerd. There have been many others unknown to us who have been mightily used by God to bring the gospel to other people. These, then, are the valiant preachers used by God to defend the truth and to protect the church against the enemies.

We see now how God promises salvation to the church. He provides for the salvation of His people through the atoning death of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. He ensures their safety by providing preachers and teachers to proclaim His truth and to defend it against attacks. These things were made known to us by way of this allegory, in which the groom sends for his bride, fetching her from the wilderness to the city.

II. God's provision of salvation to the church (vv. 9-11)

The atoning work of Christ

From the promise of salvation, we move to the provision of salvation. We shall consider how God provides for the salvation of His people. We have already spoken on that, but we want to examine the details. Earlier, the focus was on the bride. Now, we shall focus on the carriage. We notice that it is made of the best wood of Lebanon. We are told, in verse 9, "Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin." The emphasis on the material, viz. the wood of Lebanon, shows that the Son of God would come to this world to take upon Himself perfect human nature. The carriage is of wood - the best wood. The Saviour would come to the earth, to take upon Himself true human nature, but without sin. The wooden carriage, the vehicle of our salvation, is also an allusion to the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. We must be saved by the death of Christ on the cross, without which there is no other way of salvation. The wooden carriage is, therefore, about the atoning work of

Christ.

Then, we consider the design of the carriage in which the bride is carried. When sinners are united to Christ by faith, they begin to partake of the nature of Christ. They begin to be transformed into the people that God wants them to be, all because of Christ's death for them. Verse 10 says, "He made its pillars *of* silver, its support *of* gold, its seat *of* purple, its interior paved *with* love..." The pillars are made of silver, which conveys to us the idea of beauty. The church has no beauty of its own, but it is made beautiful by Christ. Individual believers are not beautiful from the spiritual point of view, for "there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10). However, by faith in Christ, they receive His righteousness by imputation. In that way, they are regarded as beautiful in God's sight. And they will continue to be made beautiful by the Spirit of God, through the hearing of God's word. This is true on the individual as well as the corporate level. We are told in Ephesians 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

The support of the carriage is of gold, which reminds us of the mercy seat of the ark in the Old Testament temple, which was made of pure gold. The mercy seat was sprinkled with the blood of the animal sacrifice once a year by the High Priest. This was to show that God could be present in the midst of His people only because atonement had been made for their sins. It pointed to the coming of Christ who would die on the cross, and shed His blood for the cleansing of the sins of His people. God's glory was shown by the "shekinah", which was the glowing cloud above the mercy seat. In the ark were the two tables of stone on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. The mercy seat covered the ark, to show that the demands of the law which would have resulted in the death of the sinner were being covered by the mercy of God. Gold also symbolises purity and value. Sinners who are united to Christ by faith are regarded as pure and precious in God's sight.

As we look more closely at the carriage, we discover that its seat is purple - which was the colour of royalty in those days. In the East, at the height of the Chinese civilisation and its influence over the surrounding nations, yellow was the royal colour. In the West, the royal colour was purple. When Jesus Christ was arrested and mocked by the Roman soldiers, one of the things done by them was to array Him in a purple robe as they mocked Him as a king. They did not realise that He was truly a king, the King of all kings. Here, the purple colour of the seat is to show that the bride sitting on it is treated as royalty. All Christians are the children of God, well-loved by Him, and precious in His sight. They are the apple of His eye. They are to be recognised as such, and treated with honour like princes and princesses. We know, however, that the world does not recognise Christians as such. We are often despised and persecuted for our faith. Life as a Christian can be tough, but we are to remember that we are the royal children of God.

Finally, consider the cosiness and comfort of the carriage. How may we describe the most exquisite sense of comfort? Silver and gold, and purple, have been used to describe wonderful qualities. There seems to be no better term left to describe that sense of supreme comfort, safety and contentment other than the word "love". Think of the homes you live in. Is it a cosy and comfortable place - a place where you can truly relax after a day of hard work? All too often, what we have is a mere house and not truly a home. For it to be a home, it must be reasonably comfortable to live in. It does not have to be elaborate nor expensively furnished, but it should be reasonably comfortable. More importantly, there should be warmth and acceptance among the family members. If love is not found in the home, it would not be truly "home" to those who live in it. Children who are unhappy at home would not want to be home much. We want our children to grow up knowing that home is where they belong. However far they go away, because of their studies or their jobs, we want them to desire coming home. Whatever trials they face in life in later years, however bitter their disappointments may be in the outside world, we want them to know that they will be accepted at home. That can happen only when there is love in the home.

This is how the carriage is described - the interior is paved with love. And it is paved with love "for the daughters of Jerusalem". We have used the word "for" instead of "by", following the King James Version of the Bible instead of the New King James Version. The carriage is made *for* the daughters

of Jerusalem. This makes better sense, for we would not expect the carriage to have been built *by* the daughters of Jerusalem. The carriage is made for the bride, and the daughters of Jerusalem who are her constant companions. This is to show that believers experience the love of God through the atoning work of Christ. When gathered together, that is a constant theme of their conversation and worship. Visitors will find that this is the chief characteristic of believers in the church - they love the Lord, and they love one another. They are able to love only because the Lord first loved them. Furthermore, the Lord has promised to be present when two or more are gathered in His name. We would expect to experience the closeness of the Lord in the church, where His people are gathered. A church that is right in doctrine but lacking in love is a misnomer. When there is constant quarelling and suspicion between the members, it will not be a happy place to come to. This, of course, poses a challenge to us. Is love experienced in the church? Is the beauty of Christ seen in His people? God has provided us the security of salvation in Christ, the beauty of righteousness in Christ, the purity of life in the finished work of Christ, and the majesty of adoption in Christ. Best of all, we are surrounded by the love of God in Christ. Any visitor should be able to see the love and beauty of Christ in the midst of His people.

Christ our Redeemer

We have covered much ground. We must now stand back and ponder on the privileges that we enjoy in Christ. We must ask, "Who has made all this possible?" It is at this juncture that we are told, in verse 11, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousal, the day of the gladness of his heart." We have changed the word "wedding" to "espousal", which is the better of the two possible translations. This is not the wedding day of the King, for there is no mention of that at all. It would be strange to have so important an event as the wedding of the king left without any description, while much has been said about the fetching of the bride. We must understand that in a Jewish marriage, there was first the betrothal, which was more binding than our modern engagement. When betrothed, the couple were legally considered husband and wife, although they would not live together yet. There was the period of waiting, in which preparations would be made for the wedding day. When the wedding day arrived, the groom would send for the bride. There would then be the marriage supper, at which the couple would be wedded. The celebration could last from one to seven days. What we have here is the fetching of the bride, with no wedding celebration mentioned at all. This is the espousal period, in which the bride is betrothed to the groom. The bride is waiting for the groom. The bride is, in fact, being taken to the groom, but the wedding day has not arrived yet.

Our attention is made to focus upon King Solomon, in regal majesty. He is described as wearing the crown that his mother crowned him with on the day of his espousal. If Solomon represents Christ, who does the mother represent? The answer is to be sought in the Scripture. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. We are told in Revelation 12 that Satan, the fiery red dragon, attempted to destroy the male Child but was thwarted by God. That male Child has to be Jesus Christ, for He was crucified, rose from death, and was taken up to heaven. We are told in Revelation 12:5 that the woman "bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne." Who is the woman who gave birth to the male Child? We are told, towards the end of the chapter, that the dragon attempted to destroy the woman but failed. The dragon then turned his fury upon the rest of her offspring, "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ". It is clear that the other offspring of the woman are the Christians, which means that the woman is the church.

The church, i.e. the people of God considered collectively, gave birth to the Christ whom Satan attempted to destroy from the beginning. God had foretold the enmity between the Satan and Christ, after the fall of Adam and Eve. We read in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This is recognised by all Christians as the first time that the gospel is proclaimed in the Bible. Satan would attempt to destroy the Saviour and, in the process, the Saviour would crush him. Christ died on the cross but, by His death, conquered Satan's last stronghold, viz. death. The woman is the church, from whom came the Saviour. Satan was unsuccessful in his attempt to destroy the Saviour, so he now turns his fury upon the members of the church. The church, however, crowns Christ as Lord. Christ has completed His work on the cross. He has died, risen, and is now glorified. The day of His

espousal - i.e. of His glorification, after His death and resurrection - was the day of the gladness of His heart. We are told in Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied..." The Lord continues to take pleasure in the salvation of souls.

We see now how Jesus Christ is portrayed in this allegory. He is our glorious Redeemer. He deserves the praise and worship of His people for what He has accomplished for them. He is now reigning in heaven. The time will come when all kings and powers will be subject to Him. All glory and praise be to our King and Saviour!

It is worthwhile digressing a little to consider the principle of interpretation we have adopted for this book. We have repeatedly said that this is a book of spiritual allegory. This book must not be interpreted literally, which would bring us countless difficulties in the understanding of various passages, and also cause us to lose so much of the spiritual riches of this book. The description of the carriage of King Solomon, with all the details concerning its various parts, would lend support to the basic correctness of our approach in understanding the book. Why should our attention be drawn to the details of the parts if they are not to be understood allegorically? It would be odd if no purpose is served by the sudden focus on the details of the carriage. Furthermore, an allegory is different from a parable, in which one or two main points are conveyed by the story without the details conveying any spiritual significance. In an allegory, however, the details are intended to convey certain aspects of truth connected with the story. You would agree that the present passage, and the book as a whole, is so rich and beautiful when interpreted as allegory.

Conclusion

We have considered the promise of salvation by God to His people. The king sends forth his carriage to fetch the bride from the wilderness. That portrays the spread of the gospel, which calls out Christ's people from the wilderness of the world, and of sin. The carriage is escorted by sixty mighty warriors, which portrays the safety given to believers as they live by faith on earth, being guided and defended by the truth proclaimed by preachers and teachers of the word.

We have also considered God's provision of salvation to the church. The carriage is beautifully crafted and fully adequate to fetch the bride. That portrays the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ's atoning death to save His people. The daughters of Zion are told to focus their attention on King Solomon who is crowned with the crown given to him by his mother on the day of his espousal. This is to say that Christians must focus their attention upon Christ, who has made salvation possible, together with all the accompanying blessing.

There are some closing applications that we must consider. First, we must trust the preaching of the gospel to save souls. As the gospel is proclaimed faithfully, God's elect will be called out of the world. The church of Jesus Christ will be built up. The gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. Satan may do his worse, but the word of God will stand. The kingdom of God will extend. We must believe that the preaching of God's word, in the power of His Spirit, is all that is needed to build up the church of Jesus Christ. We must not be diverted from the proclamation of God's word. We must not attempt to improve on God's appointed method to save souls, by introducing other methods of men's making.

Then, we must ponder the excellence of Christ more and more. We must know Him better, love Him more sincerely, and give ourselves to Him more whole heartedly. All these can happen only if we study His word more deeply, meditate more upon His word, and learn to enjoy listening to His word expounded. This is best done in the company of God's people, in the context of the local church.

Finally, we must seek assurance of our salvation in Christ, who is revealed in the word of God. The seal on an official document guarantees the genuineness of its contents. The one who puts the seal on the document is declaring that he promises to fulfill all that is contained in the document. God's promise and provision of salvation are already sealed with the blood of Christ. The more we understand the promise and provision of salvation in Christ, the greater will be our assurance. How we must bemoan the shallowness of our understanding concerning these things! How we must acknowledge the poverty of our love for Him! If you have strayed from Him, arise and seek Him today! Seek Him with all your heart, and you will find Him!

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:11-12).

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