

## **Reaching Out For Restoration (Song 5:9-16)**

by BS Poh

The fifth chapter of this book of allegory is about Backsliding and its Restoration. The normal Christian life is one of blessed communion with the Lord. The Lord does not save His people and then leave them to fend for themselves. Instead, He continues to commune with them, to take care of them and to bless them. There are occasions when we are filled with the Holy Spirit to such a measure that there is rejoicing with “joy inexpressible and full of glory” because of the closeness of the Lord. On the other hand, if we are complacent and take for granted God’s blessing upon us, our hearts may begin to grow cold. We begin to treat His blessing as common. Spiritual activities become a formality, and we are no longer excited about the things of God. We grow cold spiritually, and begin to backslide in our spiritual life.

Backsliding occurs when we are complacent, or indifferent and self-satisfied, in our spiritual life. How does backsliding show itself? First, indolence sets in, when we become lazy and careless in our response to the Lord. We are slow to do what is required of us. We show no enthusiasm and move too slowly to do whatever needs to be done. Second, self-centredness begin to characterize our lives. We would only do those things that are convenient to ourselves. Everything we do must suit our time, our situation, and our family. We think more of ourselves than of others. Third, there is procrastination, or delay, in responding to the Lord. The Lord continues to speak to us by His word, through preaching. The Lord reminds us of His truth through the circumstances of our lives. We know what should be done, but we delay until the last moment before getting it done. When we finally stir ourselves to get it done, we behave as though we have been willing and keen to do it. The Lord, however, can see the true state of our hearts. It is of no use pretending before Him. We can fool others, and we can fool ourselves, but we cannot fool the Lord. All these are signs that you are backslidden.

What are the consequences of backsliding? First, we experience spiritual barrenness. The Lord withdraws His blessing, and we sense that He is no more with us. Secondly, our conscience is burned. The word of God is meant to minister strength and comfort to His people, but it now comes across as rebuking you and wounding you in your conscience. Thirdly, your cutting edge becomes blunted. In other words, you become ineffective and less useful in the Lord’s service. Instead of being of help to seekers and new converts, you are now seeking their help and need their comfort.

What must we do to regain a close walk with the Lord? How will we be restored to spiritual health? The second half of this chapter shows us how. It shows us that there is only one way, which is to seek the Lord until we find Him again. As we seek Him earnestly, we will be led step by step to recovery. Four steps to recovery are revealed to us.

### **I. The Needs Around You**

First, we will be made aware of the spiritual needs around us. In verse 9, we have the daughters of Jerusalem asking the bride, “What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, O fairest among women? What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved, that you so charge us?” The bride has

been looking for the groom desperately, and asks her companions if they have seen him. If they see him, can they please let him know that he is sorely missed? Here is a two-fold lesson to be noted.

### ***Still needed***

From one point of view, we will feel chastised by the needs around us while we are in such a pathetic spiritual condition. The bride is awoken to the realization that the daughters of Jerusalem are mystified as to why she is so desperately looking for the groom. They cannot understand why there should be a fuss over his absence, which surely is only temporary. They are wondering what is in the groom that makes him different from all other persons such that he should be sought with such earnestness. Young believers do not understand the dangers of backsliding. They do not understand the serious consequences of becoming cold-hearted in the spiritual life. They are new to many spiritual experiences that come only with years of walking with the Lord. Not only is their knowledge of the Bible limited, but their experience of spiritual realities is limited as well. If these are true of the new believer, how much more true with the seekers who are not yet converted! "The daughters of Jerusalem" would include also true believers who are not yet integrated into the life of the church. They do not know why the church members are agitated over certain developments in the church, or in the mission field. They are not members and, therefore, have not been privy to developments within the body of Christ. They were not involved in the formulation of the policies of the church, nor in the decisions taken on certain issues. They do not know all the ins-and-outs, the warp-and-woof, of church life, and often ask questions which we have to explain patiently. They might show concern and attempt to help but we know that, ultimately speaking, the church members must bear the burden and responsibility of whatever is at stake.

The realization that "the daughters of Jerusalem" still need help should awaken the backslidden believer to pull himself together and to quickly seek restoration. The converted person cannot remain indifferent to hungry souls around him. The true disciple of Christ cannot ignore those who are seeking to know his Lord. New believers are easily shaken in their faith. The sheep that are not in the sheepfold are prone to go astray, and are exposed to many dangers. Are we so hard-hearted as not to care? A broken pipe can be repaired by a plumber, a car that needs servicing can be seen to by a mechanic, and a sick person can be attended to by a doctor. Spiritual needs, however, can only be met to by those who have spiritual life. We have to be spiritually healthy if we are to be used by the Lord to minister to the needy souls around us.

### ***Christ precious***

From another point of view, we will be made to feel how foolish we have been for loosing so precious a person as our Saviour. We know that we are not indispensable in God's work. God does not need us to serve Him. He could easily use someone else, or some other means, to accomplish His purpose. Yet, He is pleased to use us who are so unworthy. We begin to see how foolish we have been to take the Lord for granted. This point may be seen from the daughters of Jerusalem inquiring about the groom. They are asking what makes the groom different from other persons.

The unbelievers and the new believers are still unclear about the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and why He means so much to us. The needs of the daughters of Jerusalem is one thing, the value of the Lord to the believer is another. The bride is now awakened to the resources at her disposal. It is like being reminded that you have plenty of good food stored up in the freezer. What you need to do is take out the frozen food, thaw it, and cook a nice hot meal for yourself. Seek the Lord whom you already know. The Lord is the Pearl of great price. He must be sought with all our hearts. The church is built upon Jesus Christ alone. "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). All that we work for, and all that we live for, come crumbling down if not for Jesus Christ. We know, of course, that the foundation of the church, or of our faith, cannot be moved. The Lord has promised never to leave nor forsake His people. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are

awaken to realize that we need to value our Lord more. How could we have caused Him to withdraw from us?

## **II. To Seek The Lord**

There is only one answer to the predicament faced by the backslidden Christian, or the church that has grown cold - to seek the Lord in prayer and in His word. This the second step we are led to. We have already encountered a similar situation in Chapter 3, when the bride could not find the groom. On that occasion, we considered how the assurance of our salvation can be lost, and how it is to be regained. We learned that we must seek the Lord in His word. We must attend to the hearing of God's word preached. We must ponder upon what we hear, and pray to God in response. God speaks to us by His word. As we ponder upon what He is saying to us, we are to respond in prayer. We pray in private, and we pray also corporately. This is suggested by the interaction between the bride and the daughters of Jerusalem. As we interact over spiritual matters, we are brought to focus on the right things. Our aim is to find the Lord.

### ***Christ to be sought***

Verse 10, which says, "My beloved *is* white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand." We consider, first, the need to seek the Lord in His word. We have learnt from verse 7 that the backslidden Christian often feels himself attacked and humiliated in the hearing of God's word when, in reality, that is only his perception of the situation. No true servant of God would want to harm a soul that is already wounded. No true shepherd of souls would harm sheep that are in need of help. While it may be that the pastor is still young and inexperienced, or has a prickly and insensitive personality, we would expect that he has the basic qualifications to do good to souls through preaching. In fact, if he is truly called of God and is suitably qualified, we would expect him to be quite effective and useful in the work of the Lord. He will have the compassion found in his Master - "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Isa. 42:3). The pastor may be able to discern that you are backslidden, but he wouldn't know what is in your mind or what you are experiencing as you hear the word preached. Do not blame him for all your problems! Medicine will sting in an open wound. The word of God will sting in order to do you good. However, we expect the wound to heal soon, as the medicine is applied. Jesus Christ preached would soon be balm to the soul. Christ must be sought.

### ***Christ to be proclaimed***

That brings us to the second point, which is that Christ must be found much in any sermon. Preachers must proclaim much of Christ. The glory of His name, and the beauty of His character, should be portrayed clearly. As the bride ponders on her beloved, she is reminded of his unsurpassed beauty. He is white and ruddy. The word "white" in the original language means "dazzling" or "shining". It is like what the three apostles saw of the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration - the Lord glowed. The glory of the Lord's divinity was revealed at that time. Jesus Christ is actually the eternal Son of God, who has taken for Himself sinless human nature. Our Lord is portrayed here as "ruddy", just as David was described as "ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking" in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 17:42. A ruddy young man is healthy, strong, and energetic. David was a type of Christ. Our Lord is portrayed as the all-powerful Son of God, who has been given all authority both in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Who will not be encouraged, and strengthened, and stirred to love the Lord afresh, with such a portrayal of Him?

### ***Christ to be heard***

This brings us to the third point, which is that we should want to hear of the Lord as often as possible. While some Christians are ***prevented*** by circumstances from coming to hear the Lord proclaimed, there are others who ***choose*** not come to hear of Him. In churches of the Reformed and Puritan tradition, there are usually two main services on the Lord's day - the morning teaching service, and the evening gospel service. While one is aimed at building up the faith of believers, and

the other at winning souls to Christ, both show us much of Christ. It is such a pity that believers should choose not to come to the gospel service, thinking that it is meant for non-believers. How mistaken they are, for both are services of worship. We want to begin the Lord's day with worship, and end the Lord's day with worship. Hearing much of Christ will be good for our souls. We want to be reminded of the basics of the faith, and of God's goodness to us. We want our burden for souls to be saved stirred up afresh, as we hear the gospel proclaimed. Jesus Christ is proclaimed in both the morning and evening services. We should want to hear more of Him because He is truly "chief among ten thousand".

These, then, are the things we want to hear. These are the things we want to ponder and meditate upon. These are the things most likely to cause us to praise and thank God. We will be on the way to recovery from backsliding if there is much thanksgiving and praise in our prayer.

### **III. The Person Of Christ**

As we seek the Lord, we begin to ponder on His person. This constitutes the third step leading to our recovery. The person of Christ is alluded to in verses 11 to 13. Verse 11 says, "His head *is like* the finest gold; his locks *are* wavy, *and* black as a raven." The head is the centre of control, where information flows in and out. A poisonous snake is rendered harmless when struck on the head. During a war, the enemies will be easily scattered and subdued when their headquarters is struck and destroyed. The head controls the rest of the body. It also shows forth the dignity of the person. It is the highest part of the person. The groom has a head of gold, yes, of the finest gold.

#### ***The head***

In the Bible, gold is used to portray the qualities of high value, purity, and stability. We are taught in 1 Corinthians 3 that our work for the Lord must be of the quality of gold, silver and precious stones in order to withstand the fire of judgement day. If it is of wood, hay and straw, it will be burned away and proven worthless. In Revelation 1, the churches of Jesus Christ are represented by seven golden lampstands. The churches are made up of God's people, who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Each church on earth may be imperfect, but it belongs to the Lord and is being sanctified so as to be perfect on that great day when all God's elect are gathered together. In Revelation 21, the complete number of God's people gathered together are represented by "the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God". It is a cubic city, portraying stability, and it is golden, showing its purity and value. It is, in fact, "pure gold, like clear glass". The Lord Jesus Christ has a head of the finest gold, i.e. He is stable, pure, and dignified to the highest degree. He is the wisest among the wise. He is completely trustworthy. He may be depended upon.

#### ***The hair***

We consider, next, the hair of the groom. It is thick, wavy, and completely black. As in Chapter 4:1, the hair is meant to portray the thoughts of the person. Here, it is a portrayal of the strong, orderly, and consistent thoughts, or teaching, of our Lord. We have seen that the head is the centre of thought and control. The hair speaks of the actual words of the Lord, and of His revealed will. A person with plenty of black hair is youthful and strong, unlike a baby or an old man who do not have much hair. The Lord is being portrayed as strong and energetic, in a controlled and purposeful way. A storm may be powerful but uncontrolled in its destruction. A bomb may be powerful, but indiscriminate in its explosive power. Not so with our Lord - He works out all things according to the will of His Father. In the vision of Revelation 1:14, we are told that the Lord has a head and hair that were "white like wool, as white as snow". This corresponds with the hair of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, which signifies eternity and wisdom. Old men generally have white hair, showing that they have more experience and are wiser than younger people. The Lord is portrayed as having white hair in the last book of the Bible to show that He is the eternal Son of God, who knows all things and is in control of all things. The black hair of the the groom in the Song of

Solomon complements the teaching of Revelation 1. The Lord's teaching is strong, powerful, and orderly. His promises are completely reliable and will never be broken.

### ***The eyes***

Verse 12 says, "His eyes *are* like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, *and* fitly set." Unlike Chapter 1:15 and Chapter 4:1, where the bride is described as having dove's eyes, here, the groom has eyes like doves washed in rivers of milk. He does not have dove's eyes but eyes like doves. While the eyes of a dove reveal gentleness and intelligence, the dove itself is gentle and docile, pointing to the characteristics of gentleness and compassion. Furthermore, the doves are milky white, as though washed in rivers of milk. Our imagination gets transported away. We have here a person who is gentle and compassionate, and also pure - as the whiteness of milk conveys. The strength and precision of the person is portrayed by the eyes set tightly in place. He sees through all things, and knows the hearts of men. His judgement is accurate and just. Here, the Lord is shown to be our compassionate High Priest, who intercedes for His people in heaven, who is our righteous Judge, and whose judgement is just and fair. Hebrews 4:15 tells us, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

### ***Cheeks and lips***

Verse 13 says, "His cheeks *are* like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs. His lips *are* lilies, dripping liquid myrrh." The cheeks constitute the face of the person. The countenance of the person is shown on his face. What is the person like - is he fierce or kindly, angry or joyful, friendly or hostile? The spices and herbs give fragrance and healing. They are grown in an orderly manner, on the well-made beds of soil in the garden. They are also grown in banks, i.e. row by row. If a person's face shows forth fragrance and healing, and is orderly and neat like a cultivated garden, he must be someone good to have around. We would expect him to be kind and sympathetic, understanding and clear-minded, whose speech brings healing to whoever he speaks to. The lips are a reference to his speech, and the words he utters. Myrrh is a fragrant liquid. Therefore, the person's speech is gracious and edifying, and always appropriate. You can find no man who fits this description, except the Lord Jesus Christ. While we aim to imitate our Lord, we know we fall so far short of Him. Are we not thankful to have Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and our High Priest and Eldest Brother?

## **IV. The Work Of Christ**

From the person of Christ, we move on to consider His work, which is the fourth step to recovery. This is covered in verses 14 to 16. We have, first, the description of his hands and body. Verse 14 says, "His hands *are* rods of gold set with beryl. His body *is* carved ivory inlaid *with* sapphires." A better translation for "body" here is "belly", or the abdomen area. It is a reference to the location where the soft organs are found. An athletic body will not be bulging with fat, but will be tight and muscular, like carved ivory. We have, therefore, "His hands *are* rods of gold set with beryl. His belly *is* carved ivory inlaid *with* sapphires." Consider the composite picture, as applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. The hands of our Lord were nailed to the cross, and his side was pierced with a spear, so that "blood and water came out" (John 19:34). By His death on the cross, our Lord redeemed for Himself a people. Are you washed in the blood of Jesus Christ? Have you experienced the power of His salvation?

### ***Hands and fingers***

Consider the hands and fingers next. Note that the word used is a reference to the open hand, not the arm. This does not mean that the arms are not included, for how would you move the hands without moving the arms? The arms represent strength in the Bible, but the focus here is on the hands. The hands are strong, like those of a person used to hard work or handling weapons. The fingers are similarly strong, like rods, on which are rings of gold set with beryl. Beryl is a transparently green

precious stone. The hands and fingers are instruments of action and distribution. It reminds us of Isaiah 40:10, "Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong *hand*, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward *is* with Him, and His work before Him." Having redeemed His people, the Lord rules over them, and gives them gifts, or abilities, with which to serve Him. He is fair, giving to each according to his ability - just as in the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25). He is also just, governing His people by the rule of His word. Today, we hear much of the importance of the rule of law. When rule is not according to law, there will be corruption, chaos and injustice. The Lord rules according to His righteous law. We, who are His, willingly submit ourselves to Him, knowing that He is good to us, an undeserving people. Light green may be considered the colour of justice and fairness.

### ***The belly***

Then, we consider the belly, which is "carved ivory, inlaid *with* sapphires". We have noted that the belly refers to the location of the soft, or tender, organs. We are told, in Colossians 3: 12-13, "Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*." The Lord has shown tender mercies to us, and wants us to "put on tender mercies" as well. In the old King James Version, Colossians 3:12 reads, "Put on... bowels of mercies". The "bowels" are the soft organs. That is why the New King James version says, "put on tender mercies". The tender mercies shown by believers are laced with the compassion of the Lord, like the shining blue of sapphire crystals. Law and order that is not tempered with love and compassion will come across as hard and cold. Light blue may be considered the colour of love and mercy.

### ***The legs***

We move on to the last part on the work of Christ. We are told in verses 15 and 16, "His legs *are* pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold. His countenance *is* like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth *is* most sweet, yes, he *is* altogether lovely." The legs support the weight of the whole body. We expect a house with marble pillars to be big, majestic and strong. We would not expect a small wooden house to be supported by marble pillars. The Lord Jesus Christ is building no ordinary house, but a temple fit for God to dwell in! Believers are regarded as living stones. We are told in 1 Peter 2:5, "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." While on earth, we are saved to worship and serve God. The Lord does not leave His saved people to their own devices. Instead, He sustains them by His grace, providing them strength and support, like the strong marble pillars. The pillars sit on secure and precious gold foundations which cannot be moved, even in the strongest earthquake. The Lord will ensure that even the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). In other words, death itself will not be able to prevent Him from building His church. We know that the present passage is a reference to life on earth because the pillars are also compared to the cedars of Lebanon. We have already seen a number of times that Lebanon is connected with earth. When all God's elect are gathered together on the last day, the church of Jesus Christ will be perfect. The heavenly city of Jerusalem will need no temple, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22). We see now that Jesus Christ, to us, is "all and in all" - the all-sufficient Saviour (Col. 3:11).

### ***His mouth***

How does the Lord sustain His people on earth? The chief way is by, and through, His word - "His mouth *is* most sweet, yes, he *is* altogether lovely." Consistent with the teaching of the rest of the Bible, there is much emphasis on the word of God. Like honey, which is sweet, and which strengthens, so is Christ's word. The Psalmist says "How sweet are Your words to my taste, *sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103). We have seen a number of times already that the mouth, the lips and the tongue are references to speech, or words. Without the word of God, there is

no possibility of Christians continuing in their faith. We are saved by the hearing of God's word. "Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). We are sustained in our walk with God by the same word. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). How we must value the word of God more!

### ***Altogether lovely***

Having come to the end of the description of the groom, the bride says, in verse 16, "Yes, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" The bride is no longer cold in heart. She is no more sluggish and slow. She desires to proclaim the beauty and worth of her beloved. Similarly, the Lord is altogether lovely to the Christian. The Lord alone is the beloved of the church. We would not want any other to compete with Him, for He is without comparison. You ask why we would not listen to the teaching of other religions, why we would not consider other faiths - here is the answer. We have found the Pearl of great price, why should we look for other pearls and other gems? Jesus Christ is our Friend, yea, more than a friend! We want to proclaim Him to all. We want all to come to know Him as well. You can see that we are well on the road to recovery from the backslidden state. Our hearts are warm again. Our love for the Lord has been rekindled.

### **Conclusion**

When our hearts grow cold toward spiritual things, when we backslide in our Christian life, there is only one recourse for us - that is, to look for Jesus Christ again. We seek Him in the company of God's people, and we seek Him in His word. We come to hear His word proclaimed, regardless of whether it is a "teaching service" or a "gospel service". It might seem that the preacher is attacking you through his preaching. He might come across as harsh and lacking in compassion when, in fact, he is being faithful to the Lord, and to His word. Preachers who say nice things to please their hearers are not faithful watchmen of the Lord. You must listen to faithful preaching, and continue to come to hear God's word preached. Soon, the beneficial effects of God's word will be experienced by you. You will find God's word soothing. It will be balm to your bruised soul.

Faithful preaching will show you much of Jesus Christ. The Lord, in all His beauty and strength, will be revealed. As you ponder on the person and work of Christ, you will be revived in your soul. Soon, you will be reveling in His love. Spiritual strength will be channelled to you. The Spirit of God will fill you. In no time, you will be declaring to many the unsurpassed beauty of your Lord.

Do you find what we say alien? Are you asking "What *is* your beloved more than *another* beloved?" We will answer with the words of another who had experienced the love of the Lord, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

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