

## **The Beauty Of The Church Militant (Song 6:1-10)**

by BS Poh

We have been studying this book of allegory, the Song of Solomon, which concerns the love relationship between Christ and His church. We arrived at Chapter 5 which is about Backsliding and its Restoration. Chapter 6 is about the Beauty and Power of the Church Militant. We shall cover the first ten verses of the chapter, which is about the Beauty of the Church Militant. As the backslidden church searches for Christ, she is not only restored to spiritual health, but also brought to realize how much she is loved by the Lord. The same may be said of the individual believer who is restored from his backslidden state - he is brought to realize how much he is loved by the Lord. This occurs in a situation in which the church or the believer is actively serving the Lord. Unlike in romantic love, in which the couple seek to be alone together, the church or the believer will be actively engaging the world while serving the Lord.

We often use the word “militant” when describing the church that is actively serving the Lord in the world. The word is used in contrast to the portion of the church that is in heaven, which is described as the church triumphant. Believers who have gone to glory are no more struggling with sins and no more engaging in spiritual warfare in the world. They have triumphed over sins and the world, and are reigning in heaven with the Lord. In contrast that portion of the church which is still on earth is still engaged in spiritual warfare using spiritual weapons such as the word of God and prayer. The believers on earth struggle against sins in their lives, and face opposition from unbelievers as they seek to preach the gospel. They are often persecuted for their faith as well. In the midst of such spiritual warfare, the Lord draws near to assure them of His love. There are two sections to this message.

### **I. Drawing near to Christ**

We consider, first, the church drawing near to Christ. The present chapter can be understood correctly only if we remember it is a continuation of the previous one. The bride was backslidden and had come to “the daughters of Jerusalem” for help. In Chapter 5:8, the bride had said to them, “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I *am* lovesick!” As we have noted, “the daughters of Jerusalem” are the seekers, new believers, and adherents in the church. The church is constantly bringing others to hear the word of God so that there is this constant stream of seekers and new believers found in its midst. At this point it is good to ask ourselves when was the last time when we brought friends and relatives to church to hear God’s word. We are to bring God’s word to others, and we are to bring them in to hear the word. It is one thing just to invite them, it is another to bring them with you to church. Often, those invited will politely tell you that they will consider your invitation, or they might even say they would come, but you invariably find that they do not show up. If you are to see them in church at all, you will need to fetch them. If each member of the church were to bring one other person, the church would be doubled in number in no time. However, we remind ourselves that it is not mere numbers that we are looking for, but our desire is for the word of God to be heard by others. That way, we would

have a constant stream of adherents in the church. We would then have the joy of seeing one or two of them converted constantly.

***Why restoration is highly desirable***

The bride had asked the daughters of Jerusalem whether they had seen the groom, and that if they were to see him to please tell him that she was lovesick and longing for him. The daughters of Jerusalem had responded by asking, in the words of Chapter 5:9, “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?” Their questioning caused the bride to ponder on the splendour of the groom so that her spirit was lifted up again. Similarly, the backslidden believer who is asked about his Lord will be brought to a spirited declaration of His splendour and worth before others. Soon, as he ponders on Christ’s goodness and greatness in His person and work, the backslidden believer would be warmed in his heart. The cold winter would have been driven away, and the sunshine of the spring season will be seen in his life again. It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom we must focus upon. It is His greatness and glory that we should meditate upon. As we ponder upon His person and what He has accomplished for His people, we are turned from self-pity and self-centredness to admire Him and to consider the great work He is doing in the world. We would no longer be thinking of *our* work for Him. Instead, the focus would be upon *His* work that we are doing. Note the subtle difference in the ways Christians refer to their service to God. Is it God’s work that we are doing, or is it our work for God?

The fact that we are willing to involve the adherents in the church speaks well of us. Although they are not yet added to the membership of the church, they should be made to feel welcome. They are unable to attend the members’ meetings and vote in the decision-making process, but they should be able to participate in most ministries of the church. The church that does not involve such adherents miss out on much that they can contribute. In our present passage, we see the bride restored to spiritual health by the questioning of the daughters of Jerusalem. Even if unintentionally, the daughters of Jerusalem have been providentially used by God to effect the restoration of the bride. If we put on an air of superiority, and are so self-reliant that we despise the help of others, we are not going to be used by God to help others. Well-trained missionaries know this well. If they have the attitude of superiority over the people in the mission field, they will be constantly directing them and talking down to them. They will not gain the respect of the people. However, if they genuinely treat the people with respect, and are not too proud to seek their opinion or help, their ministry on the mission field will become more effective. We may be the spiritual father, or elder brother or sister, to seekers and young believers, but our esteem in their eyes will grow if they see that we are like them, and in need of their help in some ways. It is as we decrease that Christ is increased in the eyes of those we are ministering to.

That leads us to Chapter 6:1, when the daughters of Jerusalem ask, “Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?” The bride has extolled the glory and greatness of the groom. This has prompted the daughters of Jerusalem to ask this question, from which two things must be noted. Firstly, we note that the daughters of Jerusalem intuitively know that the groom cannot be far from the bride. They ask, “Where has your beloved turned aside?” They did not say, “Where has your beloved gone?” To turn aside carries the idea that He is just around the corner - not far away. If the groom is as the bride has described him, it is not possible for him to totally forsake the bride. In the same way, we can be confident that the Lord will never leave nor forsake His people, just as He has promised. He has laid down His life for His people, and He has purchased them with His blood. We belong to the Father and are the apples of His eye. Furthermore, God is faithful while His people are unfaithful. Our God cannot lie. What He has promised, He will carry out. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are awoken to the realization that the Lord cannot be far away.

Secondly, we note that the daughters of Jerusalem express the desire to come along with the bride to look for the groom. We have noted that in romantic love, many couples like to keep to themselves instead of interacting with other people. While that is understandable, Christian couples should learn to be more outward looking and be sensitive to the needs of others. It is legitimate to spend time together away from others, but we must have time for others as well. We live in a world in which many are bruised and wounded. Many are lonely and heavily laden with trials and responsibilities. The more we experience the love of God in our lives, the more we want to share that love with others. We want others to know our Lord as well. Here, the bride discovers that the daughters of Jerusalem are excited and keen to look for the groom with her. In the same way, we would be pleasantly surprised that those we minister to are willing to know more of the Lord. They are willing to have Bible studies with you and to come with you to special meetings in church. They are keen to discuss spiritual things and will appreciate the books you give them to read. Instead of thinking negatively all the time that people are not interested in spiritual things, and that they will be antagonistic, we will be pleasantly surprised by the level of interest shown and the number of people who show such keenness to know more. If there are those who are hostile and reject our goodwill, there are others who will respond positively. The church that looks out for opportunities to bring the gospel to others will be blessed by God.

Throughout this passage, we see the church militant actively serving the Lord. In verse 4, God's people is described as "*an army with banners*". In verse 10, they are described as "awesome as *an army with banners*". In verse 12, the spirit of the bride is described as "the chariots of my noble people". When the church is thus described, we have to conclude that it is restored to full spiritual health. Such spiritual health is highly desirable. How may such a state of health be achieved? The answer, of course, lies in a restored relationship with the Lord.

### ***Where the Lord may be found***

Where is the groom to be found? When asked, the bride is jolted to the realization that there is one place where she is sure to find him. Of course, he has to be in their trysting place - the place where they have spent many pleasant hours together. Verse 2 says, "My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed *his flock* in the gardens, and to gather lilies." It is the garden described in Chapter 4:12-14, "A garden enclosed *is* my sister, *my* spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants *are* an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices..." We have seen that this is the description of the church. The church is in the world, but it is not of the world. It is pictured as enclosed by a high wall all around. The flowers and spices are planted in orderly rows, such that it is so pleasant to behold, while the fragrance of the plants waft in the air. The fragrance represents the service and prayer of God's people, like the smoke of incense in the Old Testament temple rising to the throne of God in heaven. The Lord is well-pleased with the service of His people. As He observes the love between His people, and their service to Him. "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). His love is poured forth upon His people, and it overwhelms them. The bride expresses the "joy inexpressible" that only those who experience it know of. We are told, in verse 3, "I *am* my beloved's, and my beloved *is* mine. He feeds *his flock* among the lilies." Such is the ecstasy and contentment of the Lord's people conveyed by these words!

When the Lord was on earth, He could be found by His disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, or in the Garden of Gethsemane outside the city. The upper room was the place of meeting when He was ministering in the city. The Garden of Gethsemane, just outside the city, was where He and the disciples often go to pray and to rest. When Judas came with the temple police to arrest Him, he knew where the Lord could be found, viz. the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas betrayed the Lord on sacred ground. The point we are making is that the Lord can be found in "the garden enclosed",

which is the church. Every gathered church is a “garden enclosed”, a place of spiritual refuge for God’s people in a world that is generally hostile to the Christian faith. You do not find the Lord in the shopping mall, or the golf course, or the cinema. While it is legitimate to find recreation in such places, within reason, we would not associate these places with the presence of the Lord. Instead, the Lord is to be found where He is feeding the flock, i.e. where the word of God is taught and preached. He is found in the garden gathering the lilies. We have seen, in Chapter 2:1, the divine and human natures of the Lord portrayed by the roses on the plateau and the lilies in the valleys, “*I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.*” In Chapter 2:2, God’s people are described as like a lily among thorns, “Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” Like a gardener harvesting lilies to decorate the home, the Lord is gathering in the converts to build up His church. A similar idea is conveyed by the building of the temple of God, 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.”

The upshot of all that we have learned up to this point is the importance of returning to the place of prayer and worship, to seek the Lord in the midst of His people. You cannot expect to be restored to spiritual health and regain the joy of salvation except in the midst of God’s people.

## **II. Experiencing Christ’s love afresh**

We consider, in the second section, the church experiencing Christ’s love afresh. There are Christians who are not quite convinced of the importance of finding the Lord in the midst of His people - the church. They choose to read the Bible on their own, and witness to others on their own. They cut themselves off from God’s people, attending church only sufficiently to be noticed by others. They make no attempt to interact with others or to be involved in the life of the church, preferring to keep to themselves, and to leave as soon as meetings are over. You may claim that you are doing no harm to anyone. You may even claim that you are doing things right, when in reality you have a bad spirit. In fact, a root of bitterness is growing in your heart, coupled with selfishness and self-pity. No true Christian will remain long in such a state without being chastised severely by the Lord. We are told in Hebrews 12:7, “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” We are told further, in Hebrews 12:12-13, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed.” Let these words be God’s appeal to you to return to Him! Come, seek the Lord in the midst of His people! As you do so sincerely, you will be restored, and Christ’s love will begin to be experienced again.

### ***The beauty of the church***

One way by which this comes about is knowing the Lord’s love for the church. Like a dotting father praising his beloved daughter, or rather, like a lover praising his beloved, the Lord praises the church for her beauty. We are told in verse 4, “O my love, you *are as* beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as *an army* with banners!” This is a composite picture, describing the beauty of God’s people, as seen by the Lord. Tirzah was a beautiful city in Ephraim, in northern Israel. In the period of the Kings, after the reign of Solomon, at least three kings made Tirzah the capital. It was a peaceful city, with fresh air, and surrounded by vast expanse of scenic landscape. This is the first aspect of the picture, depicting the church of Jesus Christ. Next, the church is compared to the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by walls, seated majestically on top of a hill, and elevated on high ground. As we look at the city, we can imagine the flags fluttering on the walls, while the watchmen guarded the city. People would come in and out of the open gates with a sense of purpose - either to go to the farms outside the city, or to do business in the city. When night comes, the gates would be closed so that no intruder can come in, while the citizens sleep in peace. The next aspect of the church is conveyed by the picture of an army encamped on the fields. The tents are arranged in order, the banners flutter in the wind, while the general is seated on his horse, conferring with his captains. The soldiers march up and down, while others are busy at their own

tasks. This awesome army is ready to march and to do battle with the enemies. Just as the army of Israel brought fear to the enemies in the days of Moses, the church is portrayed as busily engaged in the work of missions. The church is described as beautiful like Tirzah, majestic like Jerusalem, and awesome like an army poised for battle. This is the church militant.

The external beauty of the bride has been described. The next few verses reveal that the internal beauty of the bride lies at the base of the external beauty. In other words, the external beauty of the bride arises from the beautiful and strong personal characteristics of the bride. So beautiful is the bride that the groom has to say, in the words of verse 5, "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me." This is similar to Chapter 4:9, where the groom says, "You have ravished my heart with one *look* of your eyes". This is to show how deeply the Lord loves His church. Verses 5-7 are virtually a repetition of Chapter 4:1-3, "Your hair *is* like a flock of goats going down from Gilead. Your teeth *are* like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none *is* barren among them. Like a piece of pomegranate *are* your temples behind your veil." The hair covers the head, which is the centre of thoughts. The thinking or doctrine of the church, and the believer, is orderly like the wavy hair of the bride. The beautiful and even teeth are seen because the bride is smiling. This portrays the warmth and joy of the church. The temples are partially hidden behind the veil, showing that the church is modest, humble, and dignified despite her standing before God and her knowledge of the truth.

The church is made beautiful by the Lord. She is precious in the sight of the Lord. The world may think nothing of the church, yet it is that powerful and efficient machine to accomplish His purpose on earth. The external beauty and usefulness of the church arises from her inner, spiritual, beauty and strength. What constitute the inner beauty and strength of the church, or the individual believer? It is her grasp of doctrine and her strength of character. A believer who knows correct doctrine and upholds spiritual values is beautiful and useful in the Lord's sight. Are you such a believer?

### ***The worth of the church***

Next, the worth of the bride is described in verse 8-9, "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." We know that Solomon had many wives and concubines during his reign, many of whom were pagan. This was against God's law and frowned upon in Scripture. We are told, in 1 Kings 11:3-4, "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of his father David." However, this book of the Song of Solomon was inspired by the Holy Spirit with the intention of teaching spiritual truths, and must not be compared to Solomon's polygamy. Instead, we should see verses 8 to 9 as a deliberate exaggeration to convey certain spiritual truths. Here is a palace with not one queen but sixty, assembled together with eighty concubines and their unmarried daughters. They are all so beautiful that you have great difficulty pointing out which of them is the most beautiful. Then, it is announced that the bride is coming in. As she arrives, you are awestruck by her unsurpassed beauty. None of the women and ladies present can compare with her beauty. She is simply incomparable! Such is the way the Lord looks upon the church. She is most beautiful, with none who can compare with her. As to her worth in the Lord's sight, she is like the favorite daughter of the favorite queen. She is the most precious among all the princesses. None of the queens, concubines and princesses dare to compare themselves with her. None dare to usurp her place. Everyone of them acknowledge her as the beloved of the Lord. That is worth of the church to the Lord. She is the apple of His eye.

In verse 10, we arrive at the crest of the crescendo, "Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as *an army* with banners?" Like music that is increasing in

volume, we now arrive at the peak. Everyone stands at the sidelines, admiring the bride. She is fresh and warm as the morning. She is serene and clear as the full moon. She is bright as the sun. She is awesome as an army poised for battle. She combines all the superlative qualities which show that she belongs to the groom. This is the picture of the church being prepared for the day when the Lord will gather all His people to Himself. We are reminded of Ephesians 5:25-27, "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 sanctification of the church is brought about by the Spirit of God working in her through His word. While the church is not yet perfect, either quantitatively or qualitatively, the potential and certainty of it becoming perfect is not in doubt. The time will come when the full number of God's elect will be called in. The time will come when the church will be free from sins. If the church is to be ready for the day of marriage, she must feed richly on the word of God and apply the word to her life. Spiritual growth and transformation take place only when the believer grows in understanding of, and obedience to, God's word. It is as we obey the word of God that the Spirit of God works in us. It is as we labour to serve God that He works in us mightily. The apostle Paul says, in Colossians 1:29, "To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

We have seen that the present passage is on the beauty of the church militant. The church militant must be militant. The church on earth must be actively serving the Lord. There is no such thing as the church militant that is passive. The healthy church is one that is infused with the power of the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord. For the power of the Spirit to be experienced, the church must seek a close walk with the Lord. Since the church is made up of individual members, they must draw near to the Lord and be willing to obey Him. This is especially directed to the backslidden Christian, who must seek the Lord, in the word of God, and in the company of God's people. It is to your own good that you are quickly restored to good spiritual health. Those who fall away from the faith and never return to the Lord in repentance only prove themselves apostates, i.e. they have never been true believers. We are addressing those who are true believers, who have backslidden. Do not wait for the Lord to chastise you severely to turn you back to Himself. All true believers will feel miserable when they do not have the sense of the Lord's presence. Like the bride, they would be desperately seeking for Him to find Him. This passage is teaching us that we are to seek Him where he will be found, viz. in the midst of His people. Come to church regularly, to hear the word of God expounded. You will find the Lord there. If you come with the right spirit, you will soon be restored to full spiritual health.

We have placed the primary importance on coming to hear God's word, rather than your service to the Lord. It is as we hear God's word that we are built up in our understanding and in our faith. It is in the pages of Scripture that we meet with the Lord. It is then that we would respond in thanksgiving and praise. It is then that we would give of ourselves willingly to Him in service. You cannot remain long in the church, merely growing in head knowledge of the truth. The truth will strengthen and comfort those who are submitted to the Lord. It will trouble those who resist God's will and refuse to obey Him. You will either finish life on earth as a poor specimen of Christian, who barely manage to limp into heaven, or you will submit yourself to the Lord and be escorted triumphantly into the presence of the Lord. "Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is (1 Cor. 3:13)."

What a joy it is to be healthy, and to be contributing to the health of the church. The Lord loves the church and looks upon the healthy church as beautiful - yes, so beautiful as to lavish superlative praise upon her. The individual believer who is spiritually healthy may appropriate the Lord's praise for himself. Are you one of those who are numbered in the praise of the Lord:

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*Who is she who looks forth as the morning,  
Fair as the moon,  
Clear as the sun,  
Awesome as an army with banners?*

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