

## **The Consecration Of The Expectant Church (Song 8:8-12)**

by BS Poh

We have contended that this is a book of allegory and must be interpreted as such. The normal historical-grammatical-and-theological method of interpretation must be applied to a book that is recognized as allegorical, just as it is applied to other categories of books in the Bible - be they historical, poetic, prophetic, or didactic. We avoid the so-called allegorical method of interpretation of the book in which bizarre ideas are introduced contrary to plain sense, context, and the analogy of faith. Rather, we would still ask, What does this text plainly mean? Plainly, of course, does not mean in a literalistic manner. We would ask also, "What does this text mean in context?" and "How does it compare with the teaching of other parts of Scripture?" We believe that the Bible is a spiritual book, intended for our spiritual edification. It cannot be intended to stir up lust and unworthy thoughts. Rather, we would consider what is meant to be taught spiritually.

We want to be reminded that, in the present chapter of the book of Song, the bride has reached the peak of her maturity, while waiting for the return of the groom. In a Jewish marriage, there is the betrothal in which the bride and groom are legally bound together as husband and wife, but they do not live together until the wedding day, when the groom comes to fetch her for the marriage supper. This custom has been used in the Bible to portray the relationship between the church and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has gone to heaven to prepare a place for His people. He will one day return to take the bride to be with Him. Meanwhile, the bride is waiting for His return. We have learned in Chapter 8:1-4, the gratitude of the expectant church. The church shows forth her gratitude to the Lord for her salvation, for sustenance in the faith, and for succour in trials. In Chapter 8:5-7, we learned of the faithfulness of the expectant church. The church is steadfast in her love for the Lord, refusing to be drawn away by even the offer of the most attractive riches of the world. In the present passage, which is Chapter 8:8-12, we learn of the consecration of the expectant church. The church desires to show forth her love for the Lord not merely by words, but by giving of herself totally to the Lord. That is what we mean by "consecration" - to be set apart unto the Lord. There are two sections to this message: first, there is reflection on past misery, covering verses 8 to 9; second, there is gratitude for present felicity, covering verses 10 to 12. The word "felicity" means bliss, or great happiness.

### **I. Reflection On Past Misery (vv. 8-9)**

We begin with the first section, which is a reflection on past misery by the bride. Verse 8 says, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for?" To understand this verse, we must recall the family background of the bride which we have learned from Chapter 1. On the death of the father, the property had been distributed among the children. Each child was given a plot of land which was planted with grapevines. There was this girl in the family who had been exploited by her half-brothers. They had made her take care of their vineyards, such that she had no time to take care of her own. She had also to take care of the sheep and goats of the family. She became

dark, due to constant exposure to the sun. Outwardly, she looked like any plain country lady when, in reality, she was a true beauty. She was spotted by Solomon when she was asleep under an apple tree. Solomon had fallen in love with her and courted her. She is now madly in love with Solomon and betrothed to him. She is now grown up, and ready to be married. She recalls the background she has come from.

### ***Pretended concern***

She remembers the time when her brothers discussed about her future. She was still young, probably in her adolescence. What should they do for her in preparation for the time when she is ready to get married? They appeared so caring of her, when that was not the case. How mistaken she was at that time! She trusted them. They were her brothers, even if they did not share the same father. It turned out that they had their own agenda. They were thinking of gaining out of her - by making use of her. This is how we would think back of the past, when we were not yet converted. We were in the world. We were part of the world. We interacted closely with ungodly people. Not all of them were outrightly wicked. All of them still showed traces of God's image in them. Most of them were capable of kindness and generosity. Some were highly principled and even noble. However, to our great disappointment, they turned out to be self-centred at heart. There was a time when you thought you could work together as a team. You thought you were family. You believed in "one for all and all for one". When the crunch came, they chose to save their own skin and would not think of standing by you. Even good friends were capable of back-stabbing you. Even people you trusted would take advantage of you. You became disappointed and disillusioned. Some of us were badly burned in the world. We trusted certain people, but suffered badly when they failed us. Often, the loss of money, opportunities, and even health leave scars in our lives. Then, there are the broken relationships, and the thought that those people were capable of betraying you in the ways they did - all these were hard to bear. That is why we are not surprised to find unhappy people in the world. The world is a hostile place. Do not put your trust in mere man. Do not rely on unconverted people, with all their worldly ideals.

### ***Selfish intent***

Verse 9 of the present passage shows us the true situation of the world, while verse 8 shows the apparent situation. The half-brothers of the bride discussed among themselves, saying, "If she *is* a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; and if she *is* a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar." They were actually planning in advance what they would do to their young half-sister. "If she *is* a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver." A wall is silent. It keeps people out. It makes people feel secure and homely, living within its confines. The half-brothers were waiting to see how the little sister would develop. If she becomes a homely, quiet girl who is obedient and easy to control, they would "build upon her a battlement of silver", i.e. they would put a high price upon her for whoever thinks of marrying her. They would ask for a big dowry for her such that she would either remain unmarried, and continue to be their servant, or be married off with such a high price that they would become rich through her. Now you know the true colours of the brothers! They had been thinking of gaining out of her. They were not truly thinking of her welfare. If you have heard them uttering the words of verse 8, you might think that they were so caring. Now that you have heard the words of verse 9, you are awakened to the realization that they were not such a straight-forward bunch of people after all! That was not all that they were planning. What if their sister turns out to be different from their expectation? What "if she is a door", allowing people to come in and go out? What if she develops into an independent and outgoing person, who refuses to be under control? Then "we will enclose her with boards of cedar". They were going to forcibly limit her freedom. They would not tolerate the nonsense of an independent young lady strutting in and out of the house. Practically, they would ensure that she remained as their servant, under their control.

That is what the world is like. It wants you to conform to its norms, and to accept its values. When you are like the people of the world, you will be liked by them. We were once very much like them at heart, and probably even in behaviour. When we were converted, our values began to change. We began to love the Lord, and to desire to live for Him. That was when the true colours of our friends and family members began to show. They could hardly conceal their dislike of you. They were capable of being so sarcastic and heartless in their criticism of you. You became the butt of their jokes. There were those who seemed to respect your individuality, and appeared tolerant of you. However, you must remember that being tolerant of you is different from accepting you for who you are. To tolerate religion is different from believing in the freedom of religion. The world is constantly exerting pressure upon you to conform to its image.

This is a reminder to all of us that the world is hostile to the people of God. Christians must remember the teaching of Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Christians are in the world, but not of the world. That is why you will not be accepted by the world, unless you can be made used of by the people of the world. This is not to say that you have to fear the world, for the world belongs to our God. Rather, we should have compassion for the world. The world needs us more than we need the world. The Lord has promised to be with His people to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). So, do not fear the world! Rather, be in the world to win it for Christ. But make sure that you are not pressed into the mold of the world. In order to continue being useful to the Lord in the world, we must retain our saltiness as “the salt of the earth”, and we must continue to shine as “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13, 14).

## **II. Gratitude For Present Felicity (vv. 10-12)**

From “Reflection On Past Misery” we move on to the second section, which is “Gratitude For Present Felicity”. Reflecting on the past should cause us to be grateful to the Lord for what He has done for us. This is shown in verse 10, which says, “I *am* a wall, and my breasts like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who found peace.” The bride, who is now grown up and is of marriageable age, freely acknowledges that she is a wall, i.e. she is of a quiet demeanour, a homely character, one who is not an independent firebrand. Instead, she is such a beautiful and gracious young lady, one who has found peace in Solomon’s eyes.

### ***Peace with God***

Two things must be noted here. First, the bride indirectly shows that she did not have peace in her home. She was never truly happy. We have seen how she loved her mother, and wanted to take the groom to meet her, in verse 2 of this chapter. However, she was ill-treated by her half-brothers and life was miserable. But on a deeper level, there is a restlessness that was not assuaged until she found peace. Misery arising from external circumstances is one thing, but a lack of peace is another. There are those who have everything in life, and yet they have no peace in themselves. We know that the bride has found love in Solomon. Solomon loves her, and she loves Solomon, but is it not strange that what is focussed on here is peace rather than love? You might argue that to be in love means that you have found peace, but that is not a satisfactory answer. While “love is a many-splendoured thing”, you would hardly confuse it with peace. No, this verse is pointing us to the peace, or spiritual rest, that we find in Jesus Christ.

The second thing we must note is that the bride has not only found peace, but she knows that Solomon sees her as one who has found peace. We are told, “I became in his eyes as one who

found peace.” It is one thing to think you have peace with God, it is another to know that God is at peace with you. Put another way, it is one thing to think you are a Christian, but it is another thing to know that you are accepted by God as His child. One can be mistaken about his faith or, rather, about his profession of faith. You must make sure that you are truly reconciled with God, through faith in Jesus Christ. We know from Galatians 5:22-23, that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Peace with God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. That peace is what we must crave for, and it is found only in Christ. This is where we are led to examine ourselves again as to whether we are in the faith ( 2 Cor. 13:5). It is not what you think of yourself, nor what others think of you, but what the Lord thinks of you. We do not want to be numbered among the many who, on the last day, calls upon the Lord, “Lord, Lord, have we not done this in Your name, and done that in Your name...” but are rejected by Him (Matt. 7:21-23). Are you one of those who can say, “I became in Christ’s eyes as one who found peace”?

### ***Willing surrender***

Verses 11 and 12 show us the present state of the bride, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; He leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver *coins*. My own vineyard *is* before me. You, O Solomon, *may have* a thousand, and those who tend its fruit two hundred.” Everyone knew that Solomon was a mighty king, well-known for his wisdom and the glory of his kingdom. Here, we are told that he has a vineyard which is leased out to keepers, for a thousand silver coins. This is to show us that the Lord expects His people to be fruitful, and to bring Him His due. The vineyard was used by the prophet Isaiah to represent unfaithful Israel, who failed to bring forth fruit. Isaiah 5:1-2 tells us, “Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: my Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected *it* to bring forth *good* grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.” Both the passages in the Song of Solomon and Isaiah are reminiscent of the “Parable of the Landowner” told by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 21:33-46. There, the landowner finally sends his son to collect the dues, but the son is killed instead. This parable is meant to show that the nation of Israel would be rejected because of rejecting the Son of God. The Jews claimed themselves to be God’s people, but were not accepted by God. They did not bear spiritual fruit, showing that they were spiritually dead. Those who truly belong to God would trust in Christ alone for salvation. Their spiritual life will be seen by the spiritual fruit produced.

Coming back to the present passage, we see that the bride has been given a plot of vineyard by Solomon as well. This is not the vineyard she has inherited, for it has been laid waste by neglect for a long time. We would remember what she said in Chapter 1:6, “My mother’s sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, *but* my own vineyard I have not kept.” That was in the past. The bride is reminiscing on the past, as we have seen in verses 8 and 9. Since being betrothed to Solomon, she has received this plot of land from him either as a betrothal gift or a love gift. She acknowledges that the land belongs to Solomon, and she willingly pays the lease of a thousand pieces of silver. Others have been leased the land on which they earn a living. The bride has been given the land as a gift, so that she can call it “my own vineyard”. However, recognizing that the vineyard has come from Solomon, she wants to pay dues just like others, in recognition that it has come from him. She does not want preferential treatment. Since she does not work on the land herself, she pays her workers two hundred silver coins.

Two things must be noticed. First, there is the understanding in the bride that whatever she has comes from Solomon. She indicates this by giving her dues. In the time of Abraham, it was already a practice to give a tenth of whatever was gained to God as acknowledgement that everything had come from Him. That was why, when Abraham came back from rescuing Lot, he gave “a tithe of all” to Melchizedek, “the priest of the Most high God” (Gen. 14:18, 20). In the days of Moses, the nation of Israel was taught to tithe. Although the New Testament does not specify the amount we are to give back to God, Christians have generally used the Old Testament principle of the tithe as a guide. Secondly, we note that the bride pays to Solomon from a willing heart. Although she is betrothed to Solomon, she does not want preferential treatment. Instead, she wanted to set a good example to all. She employs others to work for her, and pays them their dues, but she would not reduce what she owes to Solomon. Not only does she refuse preferential treatment, but she refuses to give the excuse that she has to employ others to work for her. Compared to us today, do we give excuses for reducing what is due to God? In the New Testament age, we are required to give willingly, generously, and privately, i.e. without declaring to others how much we have given to the Lord. We are told in 2 Corinthians 8:12, “If there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.”

The principles of giving should be extended to the whole of our life. Our life comes from God. Our health is from Him, and so are our abilities, and the opportunities to earn. We have been saved by grace, not by anything good we have done, or anything good found in us. As redeemed people, should we not consider all that we are, and all that we have, as from God? If we do, then let us show it in our lives. Unlike some churches, we do not want to be harping on the givings, and we do not set the percentage of earnings to give. We do not know what you give, and we do not want you to pledge how much to give. Let us willingly, generously, and privately give back to God according to what we have. We do not have to compare ourselves with others as to how much we are able to give, but it must be in proportion to what we have, and it must be given willingly. “Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

The bride gives willingly to Solomon out of a heart of gratitude, and out of love. The payment of the dues for the vineyard is but only one expression of her love and gratitude. We know that she has given herself over to the groom. She belongs to him, and awaits the day when he would come to take her to be his wife. Giving back to God a portion of what we have earned, or gained in other ways, is only one way by which we show forth our love and gratitude for our salvation. What about our time, our families, and our priorities? Here, we are treading on sensitive ground, but tread we must if we are to be faithful in the application of God’s word. All too often, we give money for gospel work, but are stingy with our time and over-protective of our families. We seem to think that giving regularly to the Lord’s work makes up for the failure to attend meetings in church regularly. We fail to see that we are the losers in the end because we miss the teaching from God’s word. We think that it is sufficient to read the word of God ourselves and to pray in the privacy of our own homes, failing to see that it is required of us to attend church meetings regularly. Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us, “let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” We often miss out on the special blessing of the Lord’s presence, for He has said, “where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). A child who does not eat much will not grow well. A person who does not eat regularly will not be healthy. What applies to physical feeding applies to spiritual feeding as well. You can tell which church member is spiritually healthy, or growing well, by his or her attendance at church meetings. Whenever this issue is raised, we tend to

become defensive, and think that attendance is all that is looked for by the church, failing to see that our spiritual health is at stake.

We come to another area which is even more sensitive, and that is your family. This applies particularly to Christian parents who love their children in the wrong way. This seems to be a phenomenon peculiar to this part of the world. You fail to see that you may be over-protecting your children. You are overly-concerned about their education, to the extent that you have forgotten that all that you have come from God - including your children. You allow your attendance in church and your spiritual welfare to be affected by too much time spent in dealing with their education, and the extra tuition classes they take outside school hours. Consider how much time, money and effort you spend for their physical and mental development compared to their spiritual development. Apart from extra tuition classes outside school hours, many parents would send their children to classes of various kinds, including music, swimming, dancing, mental arithmetic, art, martial arts, and others. But have you been concerned about their spiritual development? Do you send them to Sunday School regularly? Do you have family worship with them? Do you pray regularly for their salvation?

You would remember how Hannah, in the Old Testament, prayed for a son. When a son was given her, she dedicated him to the Lord and brought him to Eli, the priest, to be trained for service to God. Do you think Hannah did not love her son? We can be sure that she loved Samuel dearly, yet she recognized that the son was given to her by God. She did not want to hold back her son, but gave him freely to God. After all, she could visit him at anytime, and the son could come back to visit her. Today, most parents want their children to become doctors and engineers, but not to serve the Lord full-time. There seems to be the idea floating around that a pastor's sons should become pastors and missionaries, while the sons of other parents are not expected to become pastors and missionaries. I have been asked on a number of occasions whether any of my sons is becoming a pastor. I will be most willing and happy if all of them become pastors, if that is God's will. We do believe in the need of God's calling before embarking on full-time service for Him. The point I am making, however, is that there is a general reluctance for parents to allow their children to serve God full-time. Not only is the pastor's vocation regarded as lowly compared to those of doctors and engineers, but their pay is low for a fact. Another reason might be the perception that the pastor's life involves high risks - a perception which we have unwittingly propagated due to our emphasis on pioneering work and missions. However, you must understand that our lives are in God's hand. How safe can you be in the city, or in your home? God is sovereign. He determines how, and when, we die. You might think it is safer working in the city compared to serving God in the jungles. However, death can come to us anywhere, and at any time. If it is not the time for us to die, God will preserve us. If it is His will that we die on the mission field, we would accept it. Far better it is to die while actively serving the Lord, than to die comfortably in bed with no burden to serve the Lord! Whether or not your children end up serving the Lord full-time, my question to you is, "Do you love the Lord?" Many hesitate to answer this question because they are afraid that the response of the Lord might be, "Feed My lambs", "Tend My sheep", and "Feed My sheep".

Sometimes, stories are helpful to nail truths to our mind. Here is a true story. Before returning from the United Kingdom, we visited a couple who were in full-time service to the Lord. We asked them if there was any last word of advice for us before we left. The man held out a coin in his hand, and then open his hand with the coin sitting on his palm. He told us that if we were to hold the coin tight in our fist, God will pry it open to take it, and it will hurt. If we keep our hand open, God can take it at any time, and put it back at any time. The coin is not ours. We are holding it as a steward of God. He has the right to take it and to give it back to us. The same applies to our children, gifts, time, properties, health, and life. If we are grateful

for our salvation, and understands that everything comes from God, we will place everything we have at His disposal.

### **III. Conclusion**

We must draw to a close. In the first section of this message, we have reflection on past misery. In the second section, we have gratitude for present felicity. We have learned that believers should be grateful for salvation in Christ, with all the accompanying blessing. We are to show our love to the Lord without reservation. This blessed life in Christ is what we want to share with our unbelieving friends. You live in God's world. You have seen His goodness in the world, and in your lives. The world has been badly affected by sin. You would have experienced the miseries of the world as well. You must understand that there is no necessity to remain in the miseries of the world. There is hope in Jesus Christ. There is reconciliation with God through Him. By His death on the cross, He has done everything needful to save sinners. Come to Him!

*1 My God is good, He gave me life in Christ,  
This rich and blessed life in Christ;  
Though at this present time,  
Suff'rings and trials are mine,  
They are as nothing compared to what will be.*

*2 So come with me and live this life in Christ,  
And live this blessed life in Christ;  
Let men their charges bring,  
And woes of all kinds spring,  
We know God is for us, who can be 'gainst us?*

*Refrain:  
The Lord is my helper,  
I will not fear,  
He'll leave not nor forsake His own;  
The Lord is King,  
With Him I'll reign!*

*3 By His Spirit, God gave this hope to me,  
This sure and precious hope to me;  
And when this world is done,  
When heav'n and earth are one,  
I will hear the song of those from sin set free.*

*4 So take my hand and share this hope with me,  
And share this precious hope with me;  
Though trials from Satan flood,  
And foes may spill our blood,  
Yet in all these things we are more than conq'rors.*

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