

The Discriminating Love of Jesus
Song of Solomon 2:1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7
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The love that Jesus has for you His beloved bride is not a general, universal love, but is a special, discriminating love for you. It was a love manifested from eternity in which the Father chose you in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:4). He did not choose you because you were worthy (“none are righteous, no not one” Romans 3:10). All were rotten and deserved the righteous judgment of God. He did not choose you because He foresaw that you would believe in Jesus Christ. No, you have come to believe in Jesus Christ because He loved you and chose you to believe in Christ (Acts 13:48). We contributed nothing. All of our pride is consumed.

That discriminating love of Jesus is further manifested in His redemption of His chosen bride. In love Jesus sought out His chosen bride (though she was a harlot giving herself to the world, the flesh, and the devil). He gave up His own life, bore the fierce wrath of God, and paid the debt and penalty of her sin that He might love her now and for all eternity and make of her a bride without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27). He gave up His life for you, His beloved bride. All praise and boasting is directed to Jesus rather than to the bride.

That discriminating love of Jesus Christ for His bride is figuratively portrayed in our text today. Let such love break your heart and bring you to fall before Him as your Beloved Savior and Lord. The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are: (1) Jesus Commends Himself (Song 2:1); (2) Jesus Commends His Chosen Bride (Song 2:2).

I. Jesus Commends Himself (Song 2:1).

A. We saw at the end of the previous chapter that the Lord Jesus initiated communion with His chosen bride by extolling his love for her and the beauty of His grace in her (Song 1:15). When the bride hears the unsurpassing love of Jesus for her, she quickly responds with her heart overflowing with love for Him (Song 1:16a). From this blessed communion comes growth in Jesus Christ (Song 1:16b-17). There is no growth in Christ apart from communion with Christ. You cannot expect to see the fruit of Jesus Christ if you are not abiding in Him. That is the appointed means of fruitfulness in subduing the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil and in abounding in the fruit of the Spirit.

B. Now as Song 2:1 begins, the Lord Jesus again resumes His loving part of the dialogue with His bride by extolling to her His own beauty.

1. There has been some controversy over who the speaker is.

a. The older Reformed scholars understood this to be the Lord Jesus that was speaking in Song 2:1 (more recent scholars and rabbinic writings have tended to view Song 2:1 to be the words of the bride). It seems to me that the words of the Lord Jesus in commending His bride in Song 2:2 are most naturally the continuation of the words in Song 2:1 (where Jesus is “THE lily of the valleys”), and then He speaks of the bride in Song 2:2 (“AS the [rather “a”] lily among the thorns”).

b. Also, it is more likely that Jesus would commend Himself in Song 2:1 (with the words of deity “I am”) than would the bride.

2. Before considering the specific words that Jesus uses to commend Himself, you may wonder, “Is it appropriate for Jesus to commend, extol, and praise Himself in speaking to His beloved bride?”

a. Is that an example that we husbands should follow with our wives? Is it an example that we should practice at work—praising ourselves to others? Consider the words of Solomon in Proverbs 27:2 (2 Corinthians 10:12). God says in these and many other passages that to praise yourself is forbidden, is not wise, and is therefore a sin. How many times in the course of a day do we boast in ourselves

because we do not give glory or credit in our hearts or in our speech to God and to others? This is stealing from and robbing the Lord. It is one thing to give an accurate account of your experience and accomplishments when you write a resume, but it is another thing to focus the spotlight on yourself (either to yourself or to others). It is not wrong to receive praise for a job well done. However, let it come from others and not from yourself, and give thanks and glory to the Lord from the heart (2 Corinthians 10:17-18).

b. Now what about the Lord Jesus commending, extolling, and praising Himself? That is altogether different. For Jesus is not only fully man, but is fully God. For the Son of God to commend Himself is actually an indirect proof of His deity (since mere man is not to do so, Jesus is God). In fact, it is not only appropriate for Jesus to do so; it is good, right, and necessary that He do so; for He is the Creator. He upholds all things by the word of His power. He is absolutely full of grace and truth. He is most glorious. As Mediator, He is King of kings and Lord of lords. God commands throughout His Word that He alone be worshipped for His beauty, majesty, and glory. The Lord Jesus has every right to extol His own beauty and glory to His beloved bride, for in so doing He is giving to her the very reasons and motivation why she should worship Him and enter into a blessed and intimate communion with Him.

3. Now let us consider the praise and commendation Jesus gives concerning Himself to His chosen bride.

a. "I am the rose of Sharon."

(1) Jesus begins by extolling His own deity—"I Am". He is the great "I AM" that revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush ("I AM that I AM" Exodus 4). As God, Jesus is eternal, self-existent, and self-sufficient—He is dependent upon no one or nothing. When Jesus was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He asked the hundreds that came to arrest Him, "Whom do you seek?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." He answered, "I AM" and like a row of dominoes they all fell backwards under the infinite power of the Great I AM. Jesus used this form to describe and commend Himself many times in the Gospel of John: "I AM the bread of life" (John 6:35); "I AM the good shepherd (John 10:14); "I AM the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25); "I AM the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6); "I AM the true vine" (John 15:1). When Jesus declares Himself to us to be any of these "I am" commendations, our love-bound duty is to fall upon our face and with Thomas declare, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

(2) Jesus does not say that He is "a" rose, but "the" rose of Sharon (a fertile plain in Israel). There is no rose like Him that excels Him in glorious beauty and sweet fragrance. There is none so glorious who exudes such a fragrance of grace, love, truth, and holiness to His bride. Men, perhaps the description of Jesus being "the rose of Sharon" does not arouse our macho sensibilities. We may want a different description of a more masculine and more manly Jesus. Jesus was not effeminate. He was and is a Man's man—He is the Son of Man. That is Jesus' own description of Himself. He is "the rose of Sharon". Why does Jesus compare Himself to a flower? Women love flowers (particularly roses). Jesus captivates us, His chosen bride, by way of His unparalleled glory and beauty. He attracts us to Himself like that most glorious rose. We cannot get enough of His fragrance. Whether you look upon Jesus in eternity, in His incarnation, in His life, death, or in His resurrection, His ascension and His Second Coming—His love, His power, His holiness, and His truth are beautiful and glorious (especially to His bride). If you do not view the Lord Jesus as most beautiful and glorious, I dare say you have substituted someone or something in this world in His place. That is spiritual adultery. It is idolatry. It is to leave your first love.

b. I am "the lily of the valleys".

(1) The "I am" applies here to Jesus as the lily of the valleys (as does Jesus being "the" lily of the valleys who has no rival as to the beauty of His pure love). The white lily not only speaks of the beauty of Christ's love, but the incomparable purity and faithfulness of that love. His love for you, His chosen bride, was demonstrated not in doing what selfishly pleased Him, but in doing that which pleased His Father even to sacrificing Himself and bearing His Father's wrath for you, His beloved and chosen bride. The love of Jesus is pure and faithful. He will not betray you, though those who have said they loved you may have

betrayed you. Dear ones, one who says he/she loves you but does not lead you to Jesus, does not lead you to walk in obedience to His commandments, and does not lead you to hunger and thirst to commune with Him privately and publicly does not have a pure love for you—it is a selfish love. One who truly loves you as Jesus loves you will lead you to love Jesus all the more.

(2) The Lord Jesus is not only the rose of Sharon to His beloved bride where it is easy to walk on the plains, but He is also the lily where it is not easy to walk in those steep valleys. Jesus is not simply a gracious lover of your soul when you are walking in the exalted plains where it is flat and where there is plenty of light, but is the same gracious lover of your soul when you are scaling those difficult valleys where there are more rocky paths and where the sunlight is not as bright. Jesus is not a fair-weather lover who only loves and who only cares for you when all is going well in your life (with your marriage, work, temptations, and communion with Christ). He also loves you with a pure, unchangeable love when you are struggling in your marriage or at work, and when you see your weakness to stand against the temptations, mighty trials, and physical afflictions that would seem to destroy you. Jesus is knit to your heart and is one spirit with you. If His love for you carried Him to die for you and to suffer the greatest agony anyone has ever suffered, His love for you will carry Him to live for you and to be near you even when you or loved ones walk through the valley of the shadow of death. If while you were His enemies He loved you to die for you, then now that you are His bride will He not care for you and provide for you?

II. Jesus Commends His Chosen Bride (Song 2:2).

A. Jesus now turns His words and attention to you, His beloved bride, and commends you “as the lily among thorns” (“as A lily”).

1. Jesus having already called Himself, “the lily of the valleys”, says that you, His chosen bride, are like Him (“AS a lily”).

2. He is the original lily—you are the picture that bears His image. That purity and faithfulness of love in Jesus Christ has been implanted in your soul. It is not yours by nature, but by grace alone. It will grow and become more like Christ’s as you walk in the truth and commune with Him in the Word, prayer, meditation, and the ordinances of Jesus Christ. As Jesus commends His beauty, so He commends yours.

B. You may not feel beautiful as a struggling Christian. But Jesus does not see you as beautiful only when you are victorious and all is going well.

1. He sees you as beautiful even when you are warring against all those thorns in your life—the world, the flesh, and the devil—when you are struggling against temptation and sin—and when you feel like a bruised reed or flax that is ready to be quenched. For what Jesus sees as beautiful in you is not only your victories, but also His persevering grace in you when you are beaten down by your defeats and hardly know how to express your shame and sorrow over your failures. He sees you as beautiful because He sees His beautiful election in you; He sees His beautiful redemption in you; He sees his beautiful righteousness with which you are clothed in justification; He sees His beautiful repentance in you; He sees His beautiful tears of joy in you at His forgiveness; He sees His beautiful work of sanctification in you; and He sees His completed and perfected work of glorification that is yet to be realized. You may correctly see much that is yet ugly about you due to your sin and struggle against it, but I believe that you will not arise to war another day and that you will not see growth unless you see with a more clear vision that Jesus sees you as one of His beautiful lilies among the thorns. You are not a thorn, but a lily because of His differentiating love for you.

2. Not only are those thorns the enemies that are within, but they are the enemies that are without that hate and despise the beauty of Jesus Christ (His lordship, His purity, His truth, His salvation), and because you are a lily in His image—they will hate and despise you because you are a lily and not a thorn

(2 Corinthians 12:7). Thorns are painful to body and soul. When they come to rage against you and when they mock and scorn you, will you despise your likeness to Jesus Christ as a lily and act like a thorn in order to escape that persecution and in order to find the approval of thorns? Or will you persevere in showing forth your likeness to Jesus Christ and thus reveal there is a real difference between lilies and thorns? Thorns will not become lilies by lilies acting as thorns. It is not by your compromises to the thorns that you win thorns to Christ. It is by being more like Jesus Christ (conformed to His image) even in the midst of persecution that the true difference between the cursed nature of the thorn is seen and the blessed and gracious nature of a lily is seen. The end of the thorn is to be burnt and destroyed. Why would you want to look and act like one that is reserved for destruction?

3. Jesus says, "So is my love among the daughters [of this world]." What makes the difference between the lily and the thorn is the electing, redeeming, justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying love of Jesus Christ that never changes and that will complete what it has begun. Jesus bore a crown of thorns to forever remove the curse of thorns from you. Those thorns (enemies) are now all defeated and are all used for your sanctification that you might by Christ's differentiating love for you increasingly bear the image of a lily and increasingly hate the image of a thorn. Satan intends the thorns to destroy you. Jesus intends the thorns to purify you and show you that this world is not your home unless you are a thorn. One day the love of Jesus will take all of you, His lilies, and will transplant you into a heavenly garden where there will never again be thorns to tempt, afflict, or persecute you. Let it be, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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