

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Index

1. The Pastor's Letter - Song of Solomon – a neglected book
2. Gleanings in the Psalms – Psalm 69 concluded
3. Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers – part 3 (Who have been called Eccentric)
4. Mrs. Seaton's letter to the boys and girls – a poem on "Creation"
5. Snippets from the pens of men in a bygone age.



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The Song of Solomon
– a neglected book –
(The Pastor's Letter June 1975)

Dear Friends,

Probably one of the most generally neglected books in the whole of the Bible is The Song of Solomon. The reason for the neglect is, no doubt, to be partially found in the failure to decide just what "kind" of a book the Song of Solomon is, and just what it is supposed to be saying to us as the believing people of God in our own day. May we just make the subject of our letter for this time, then, a brief outline of the background and meaning of Solomon's Song, and a turning of our eyes to one of the greenest pastures in the whole of the Scriptures?

The great Puritan John Flavel describes the Song of Solomon as, "A crystal stream of pure spiritual love, gliding sweetly betwixt two pleasant banks – Christ and the Church." So it is. There are two main characters in the book, the "beloved", and the "spouse," sometimes referred to as "the Shulamite", or as "my love". On the surface, the "beloved" of the song is Solomon himself, and the "spouse" is that young Shulamite woman whom Solomon has betrothed to himself. The songs that "glide sweetly" between them constitute the words of the book, and they are the expressions of their deeply-rooted devotion to one another – the "beloved's" devotion never failing or waning, but the devotion of the "spouse" very often ebbing as well as flowing. But, "a greater than Solomon is here," so that those expressions of devotion become as John Flavel says, "a crystal stream of pure *spiritual* love," and the "two pleasant banks" that those words glide between are not just simply King Solomon and his bride, but King Immanuel and His Spiritual Bride – the Church – for the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Essential to the understanding of the Song of Solomon is some kind of a background against which to set the book; and for this purpose, it is good to remember the customs and procedures that surrounded a Hebrew marriage. The first thing that took place was the

"betrothal" of the young bride to her bridegroom. This took place when the father of the bride gave his daughter in marriage to the bridegroom and when the bridegroom paid a "dowry" for "the hand" of his young bride. There then followed a time of separation called "the interval." During this time, the bridegroom returned to his father's house, and the bride remained in her own home, preparing herself for marriage, until that day when her beloved would come for her with a great procession of his friends, and would convey her back to his father's house where the wedding feast was spread and enjoyed for a period of seven days.

How vivid that background! Has the Church of Christ – Christ's Bride – not been "betrothed" to her heavenly Husband in the Covenant of grace from time immemorial? Was it not that very fact that Christ rehearsed before His disciples in the upper room when He prayed to His Father in the great High Priestly prayer – "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me"? Indeed, it was; as Paul reminded the Church at Corinth, she was "betrothed to Christ as a chaste virgin," and should labour to remember such a great blessing in her soul. With regards to the payment of the "dowry", could anything be more precious than the fact that this has been paid with crimson coin drawn from the Heavenly Bridegroom's very veins?

"From heaven He came and sought her,
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died."

There is no more outstanding truth in the whole of the Bible than the fact that the Church of God is purchased with "his own blood" in the person of "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So precious is the church to God – because she is to be "to the praise of the glory of his grace" – that He would only redeem her and betroth her to Himself with "his own blood", and nothing or no one else is under that enormous dowry price, but the Bride for whom Christ bled! We are now in the "interval" of the old Hebrew marriage: our Bridegroom has returned to His Father's home above, and we are left

in our "house of clay" for the time being. During this time, there is much "preparation" on hand if we know the sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. And then, one day, a day which the Father has set in His own purposes, the cry will go up, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," and Christ shall appear "with clouds descending." Then, will come the "wedding feast" for all the ransomed church of God. Then, she will be "adorned as a bride" to meet her Husband and that eternal union will never be broken, for it is what "God has joined together."

Such is the union, then, that the Song of Solomon is pointing us to; and we may read that book, reading far beneath that earthly love that is set forth there in the devotion of Solomon and his bride, to that heavenly and "spiritual love;" which is meant to flow between Christ and the Church. It is therefore, well called, "the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's."

Again, on the surface, it is the greatest of all the songs that Solomon ever wrote. It is the one which he himself has entitled in that way, and this is because it speaks of the young Shulamite whom he has chosen above all others – although here is little in her for any to see – "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" she herself asks of him. But, again, "A greater than Solomon is here," for, in heavenly language, it is the song of the King of kings. He, too, has chosen a bride out of this world of sin and unbelief; He has done it for the glory of His own name and mercy, for, indeed, there is nothing to be seen in *this* Shulamite who, by nature, is as "black as the tents of Kedar," and who must often say of herself, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." *Yet*, this same "peasant maid" will one day occupy the great King's banqueting house where His banner over her will be perpetual love. How much, then, should this "Song of songs" be upon her lips? The Bible itself is "The Book of Books," for it is the one Book which speaks of our soul's salvation. We may well think of that prayer of Christ in John 17 as "The Prayer of prayers," for how much a prayer of our salvation that prayer was? "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they behold my glory." And so, this Song

of Solomon's is well entitled, "The Song of Songs," for it is the song of our salvation. As Solomon forsook the courts of his palace to seek out his bride who was going to be the subject of his song of songs, so our Lord Jesus Christ came forth, "Out of the Ivory Palaces, into this world of woe," to "seek and to save that which was lost."

Who else could, or should, sing such a song as this, as those who are redeemed with "the precious blood of Christ"? In "comparing earthly things with earthly," it is the song of Solomon and his spouse; but in "comparing heavenly things with heavenly," it is nothing less than the very psalm of Christ and His Church. In this "song" the unbeliever has no part, until it is placed within their mouths as "a new song", when the old heart of unbelief is taken away and a "heart of flesh" implanted. Like the love of Solomon's bride, of course, the believer's love very often ebbs and flows. But, as we are shown the love of the bridegroom as ever steadfast, so we may gladly remember that the love of our heavenly Bridegroom – a million times more – "endures unchanging on." This song can be our "song in the night."

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

Gleanings in the Psalms

(Psalm 69 Concluded)



Verse 13. "But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord ..."

This marks the turning point for the psalmist; he is reminded of the place of prayer and of his acceptance there before the Lord. As David Dickson puts it, he now sees his head above the water, and has every hope of a full deliverance in his cry unto the Lord. "This is half a deliverance before the full deliverance come," he says, for the psalmist is now with his head above the water, and not so afraid as when he began the Psalm.

Verse 13. "But as for me, my prayer ..." What is prayer but the breathing out of that grace which is breathed into the soul by the Holy Spirit? When God breathed into man the breath of life he became a living soul; so when God breathes into the creature the breath of spiritual life, it becomes a praying soul.

William Gurnall

Verse 15. "Let not the waterflood overflow me ... let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." According to Dean Stanley, the word *beer* which is here translated "pit" – is always rendered "well", except in this and three other cases. When such wells no longer yielded a full supply of water they were used as prisons, no care being taken to cleanse out the mire remaining at the bottom. The Dean also tells us ... that "they have a broad margin of masonry round the mouth, and, often a stone filling up the orifice." The rolling of this stone over the mouth of the well was the well's "shutting her mouth," and the poor prisoner was, to all intents and purposes buried alive.

C.H. Spurgeon

Verse 17. "And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily." Here we have:-

1. The Prayer: "Hide not thy face."
2. The Persons: "Hide not thy face from *thy servant*."
3. The Plea: "For I am in trouble."
4. The Pressure: "hear me speedily."

Hints to the Preacher

Verse 21. "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." This passage is to be overlastingly linked with the death of our Saviour on the cross. Joseph Alexander points out the following facts; "Gall and vinegar," he says, "are here put together to denote the most unpalatable forms of food and drink. The passion of our Lord was so providentially ordered as to furnish a remarkable fulfilment of this verse. The Romans were accustomed to

give sour wine, with an infusion of myrrh, to convicts on the cross, for the purpose of deadening the pain ... On the part of the Roman soldiery it may have been an act of kindness; but, considered as an act of the unbelieving Jews it was giving "gall and vinegar" to One already overwhelmed with anguish." Bearing this in mind, then, we see the prophetic force of the following verses commented on by several writers

Verse 22. "Let their table become a snare before them ..." That is, for a recompense for their inhumanity and cruelty towards me. How exactly these things were fulfilled in the history of the final seige of Jerusalem by the Romans. Many thousands of the Jews had assembled in the city to eat the paschal lamb when Titus unexpectedly made an assault upon them. In this seige, the greater part of the inhabitants miserably perished.

Wm. Walford

Verse 23. "Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake." Observe the Divine retribution of the Jews. They gave gall and vinegar as food and drink to Christ, and their own spiritual food and drink – their "table" – has become a snare to them. His eyes were blindfolded, their eyes were darkened. His loins were scourged, their loins were made to shake.

Christopher Wordsworth

Verse 25. "Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents." After the Temple itself was turned to ashes, the remnant of the Jewish people begged of Titus that he would permit them to pass through the breaches of the wall and go into the wilderness – a request which he indignantly refused. (Josephus) So that, there was no inhabitant for their tents.

Verse 29. "But I am poor and sorrowful ..." This introduces the final part of the psalm where the true worshipper and his inheritance are set forth, for, "God will save Zion ... and they that love his name shall dwell therein"

Spurgeon's *Eccentric Preachers*

Part 3 - Who Have Been Called Eccentric?

In a previous lecture we gained some little light upon the true meaning of eccentricity and we discovered it in certain quarters where it is little suspected, while we saw many to be free from it who have been popularly charged with it. Let it not however, be supposed that we shall attempt the justification of all eccentrics. We are sorrowfully compelled to concede to critics of the ministry that persons have entered it who have sadly disgraced our high calling. Men in all denominations have earned notoriety by being out of centre morally and spiritually: these have deserved to be called eccentric in the worst sense. Find us a man who tries to attract attention by the affectation of oddity, who is a mere mountebank or mimic, and we have not a word to say in his defence, but we give him over as a dead horse to the dogs of criticism. They may rend him in pieces and devour him if they so desire, for imposters and pretenders deserve the critics sharpest teeth. Find for us a preacher who obtains notoriety for himself by descending to buffoonery, and who goes out of his way to any smart things, and makes jokes on sacred subjects, and we decline to be his advocate. Natural humour may possibly be consecrated and made to wear the yoke of Christ, but he who apes it is no true man.

A reputation for eccentricity has been unjustly fastened upon many men by persistent falsehood. Throw enough mud and some of it will be sure to stick: upon this theory have good men been assailed. Whatever of originality and quaintness they have possessed has been grossly caricatured: and silly tales, the worthless legends of remote periods, have been revived and fathered upon them. It is interesting to trace the pedigree of a pulpit story, though it is not often possible to discover its actual parent: in fact, we believe that like Topsey, many of these tales have no father nor mother but may say of themselves "specs I growed" The rise and progress of a current falsehood if well studied, would reveal a sad page in human history. The same

anecdotes occur from age to age, but they are tacked on to different men.

I remember reading with some amusement of Lorenzo Dow who is reported some sixty years ago to have slipped down a tree in the backwoods, in order to illustrate the easiness of backsliding. He had previously pulled himself up with extreme difficulty, in order to show how hard a thing it is to regain lost ground. I was all the more diverted because it has so happened that this pretty piece of nonsense has been imputed to myself. I was represented as sliding down the banisters of my pulpit – and that at a time when the pulpit was fixed in the wall and entered from behind! I never gave even the remotest occasion for that falsehood, and yet, it is daily repeated, and I have heard of persons who were present when I did so, and with their own eyes, saw me perform the silly trick. He is the original tale, extracted from Mr. Taylor's "Model Preacher":-

"A man once went to Vincennes, in the United States, to hear Lorenzo Dow preach on backsliding. He said, 'An immense concourse of people assembled in the woods, and waited for Dow's arrival. Finally he made his appearance, and at the time all expected the sermon, he arose, climbed up a smooth sapling, and cried out – Hold on there, Dow; hold on. He soon slid down to the ground, and put on his hat and left. That was all the sermon we heard that day.'"

If this was "all the sermon" it certainly left a great deal for the hearer to work out, and it reminds us of the Welsh preacher who, with almost as little speaking, forcibly brought a great question before his people. He ascended the pulpit on a Sunday morning, looked around him and said, "My brethren, I shall ask you a question which neither you nor I can answer - 'what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'" When he had thus spoken he left the pulpit, walked down the aisle, and went home. If the hearers were not led to think that morning it was no fault of his.

Across many of the stories which were printed concerning Rowland Hill, he wrote with his own hand the words, "A lie." and truly there

are others of us who might wear out our pencils in doing the same. What need is there of all this invention? We have faults enough without imputing to us more than we have committed. A minister who is much before the public has need to be thick skinned and to exercise to a very high degree the virtue of longsuffering. It may help him if he will remember the conduct of good Cotton Mather, a man remarkable for the sweetness of his temper. On one occasion he received a large number of abusive letters. All of these he tied up in a packet, and wrote upon the cover, "Libels. Father, forgive them." No man of God need be astonished at slander as though some strange thing had happened unto him, for the best servants of God have been subject to that trial. Mr. Whitefield truly said, "Thousands of prayers are put up for us, and thousands of lies are spread abroad against us."

I commend to young preachers when they are tried in this fashion the wise and weighty words of Thomas A' Kempis:-

"My son, take it not grievously if some think ill of thee, and speak that which thou wouldest not willingly hear. Thou oughtest to be the hardest judge of thyself and to think no man weaker than thyself. Let not thy peace depend on the tongues of men: for whether they judge well of thee or ill, thou art not on that account other than thyself. Where are true peace and true glory? Are they not in God? He who careth not to please men nor fears to displease them shall enjoy much peace."

Dr. Campbell once told me the following story:- On one occasion when Mr Wesley was preaching he said, "I have been falsely charged with every crime of which a human being is capable except that of drunkenness." He had scarcely uttered these words before a wretched woman started up and screamed out at the top of her voice, "You old villain, and will you deny it? Did you not pledge your bands last night for a noggin of whisky, and did not the woman sell them to our parson's wife?" Having delivered herself of this abusive calumny the virago sat down amid a thunder struck assembly, whereupon Mr. Wesley lifted his hands to heaven, and thanked God that his cup was

now full, for they had said all manner of evil against him falsely for Christ's name sake.

After this we feel reconciled to the idle tales which buzz about us, annoying us for a small moment, but doing no great damage.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

In this edition I just want to leave this poem with you. The Bible tells younger people to "remember" their "Creator" in the days of their youth and you will see how this poem is all about our Creator.

The Maker of the universe
As man to man was made a curse;
The claims of Law which He had made
Unto the uttermost He paid.

His holy fingers made the bough
That grew the thorns that pierced His brow:
The nails that pierced His hands were mined
In secret places He designed.

He made the forest whence there sprung
The tree on which His body hung
He died upon a cross of wood,
Yet made the hill on which it stood.

The Throne on which He now appears
Was His from everlasting years -
But a new crown adorns His brow,
And every knee to Him shall bow.



Snippets

The Rocket and the Star. (From Sword and Trowel 1870)

Two rockets stood side by side in a garden. One of them said to the other, "I have been standing here for the last five minutes looking at the stars. I wonder what men see to admire in them! There is that insignificant little speck yonder. I'm sure I could give a thousand times the light of his paltry glimmer."

Just then the man came round and touched the rocket with his torch. Up it went with a whizz and a blaze till it came to its utmost elevation and then it burst itself. There was a pop and a glare, and down came the rocket-stick and all was over, and the little star looked down demurely, as much as to say, "Ah Mr Rocket! And where are you now?"

There are many firework Christians.

God's Timepiece. (Thomas Watson)

"Nothing stirs in the world but shall carry on God's designs – as the cross-wheels in a watch carry on the motion of it, and serve to make the alarm strike. That which the wicked intend for the destruction, shall turn to the deliverance of the Church. As Luther wrote to the Elector of Saxony, 'Let your Highness know that the affairs of the Church are far otherwise ordered in heaven, than by the Emperor and States at Nuremberg.' While the adversaries go about to ruin the Church, they shall only repair it."

Satan's "Conversions". (Robert Murray McCheyne)

"When the Spirit of God is really working in the heart, he makes the man look to a pierced Christ. Wherever he goes, this is the prominent object in his eye – Christ whom he has pierced. Satan would make a man look anywhere rather than to Christ.

There is such a thing as false conversion. Satan sometimes stirs people up to care about their souls. He makes them look to ministers, or books, or meetings, or duties, or feelings, or enlargement in prayer etc.; he will let them look to anything in the universe except to one object – 'The cross of Christ.' The only thing that he hides is the gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ. When it is the Spirit of God, he will not let the soul look to anything else but to Christ – a pierced Christ"

Pray Without Ceasing. (John Gerhard)

"The advantage of prayer is so great that it cannot be expressed. For what the heart is to the living man, prayer is to the soul; what rest is to the weary, what joy is to the mourner, what gold is to the needy, what strength is to the weak, what the muscles to the body, what the breath and blood to the life – all that, to the troubled soul, is prayer. What the sun is to the sky, prayer is in a Christian man. Prayer is the *dove* which, when sent out, returns again, bringing with it the olive leaf, namely, peace of heart; prayer is the *golden chain* which God holds fast and does not release until He blesses; prayer is the *strong wind*, which blows away the locusts of hell; prayer is the *Moses' rod* which brings for the water of consolation out of the Rock of Salvation; prayer is *Samson's jaw bone* which smites down our enemies; prayer is *David's harp* before which the evil spirit flees; Prayer is *David's shepherd bag* which furnishes sling-stones for the destruction of the enemy; prayer is the *key* to heaven's treasure. Prayer is the *little bark* which bears us in safety through this deep and stormy sea of life; it is *sweet incense*, precious in God's sight. Prayer enlightens the mind, nourishes confidence and hope, kindles love, increases humility, and begets within our minds a lively desire for heavenly things."