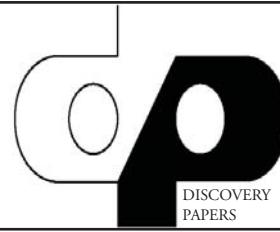


LOST AND FOUND

SERIES: FAIR AS THE MOON, BRIGHT AS THE SUN



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Song of Songs 5:2-6:3
5th Message
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The Scriptures sometimes speak of difficult things and raise issues that make us uncomfortable. God intends for His word to bring healing and hope, and as we continue in our study of Song of Songs, we will see that He can use difficulty in relationships to draw us closer to one another and to Him.

Our passage today begins in verse 2 of chapter 5. The bride is speaking of an event that actually happened, but parts of the event are recounted as a dream ("I slept, but my heart was awake"). Verses 2-7:

BRIDE

I slept but my heart was awake.

Listen! My lover is knocking:

"Open to me, my sister, my darling,
my dove, my flawless one.

My head is drenched with dew,
my hair with the dampness of the night."

I have taken off my robe—

must I put it on again?

I have washed my feet—

must I soil them again?

My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening;

my heart began to pound for him.

I arose to open for my lover,

and my hands dripped with myrrh,

my fingers with flowing myrrh,

on the handles of the lock.

I opened for my lover,

but my lover had left; he was gone.

My heart sank at his departure.

I looked for him but did not find him.

I called him but he did not answer.

The watchmen found me

as they made their rounds in the city.

They beat me, they bruised me;

they took away my cloak,

those watchmen of the walls!

On their wedding night (described in chapter 4), the groom spoke eloquently and tenderly of his bride's beauty, patiently inviting her to draw near to him. The bride, pictured as a locked garden, opened herself fully to him, and in verse 1 of chapter 5, God speaks His approval of

their love.

Verse 2 seemingly begins in the same bedroom, but the circumstances have changed. The bride has ended her day, fastened the door, and gone to bed with the expectation of sleeping until morning. The groom arrives from some late-night outdoor endeavor, wide awake and intent on an intimate interlude before going to sleep. He has one plan; she has another.

It is worth noting that when the groom spoke to his bride on their wedding night, he was thoughtful and patient. But look at the way he speaks now. He uses a succession of staccato phrases, one after another, delivered without thought. "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."

Also note how many personal pronouns he uses: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head and my hair are damp." His thoughts and intentions are entirely for himself, and when he feels rebuffed by his wife, he leaves.

The bride's words are also instructive. Her objections sound contrived. "I have washed my feet—must I soil them again?" That is, "You can't possibly suggest that I get up and smudge my pedicure? How can you expect such a thing?" Her response signals indifference to him, and he is hurt and leaves.

When she realizes what is happening, she changes her mind. She goes to look for him, and here is where dream and metaphor become difficult to separate from reality. One obvious imagined experience is her description of searching in the night for her husband and being beaten by the watchmen. In actuality, she is beating herself up. She is disappointed with herself, so she dreams that the sentinels of the town are beating her.

We shouldn't be surprised to discover that this new marriage has troubles. In every marriage are attitudes and actions that cause hurt and create discord and misunderstanding. In marriage, you can't just "put your best foot forward" and manage the impression you leave of yourself. Describing the first marriage in its innocence, Genesis 2:25 says that the man and the woman were naked and not ashamed. Nakedness in this sense means to be known, secrets exposed, and to be loved and believed in nonetheless. It also means to not regret being known, to be unashamed of who you really are.

So if marriage is a real connection between real people, and if the disrobing that takes place in order to be physically intimate mirrors the taking off of masks to fully expose the real person on the inside, then there are going

to be times when you hurt one another. But such vulnerability is also an advantage. The person who can break the balloon of your own self-importance but loves you anyway and believes the best about you—that person is God's gift to you. So while difficulty in marriage is inevitable, it can be positive if we make choices that allow it to be.

As an aside, let me note that sometimes difficulty in marriage is not a matter of hurt feelings and breakdowns in communication. Some cases involve serious trauma that may require professional counseling and intervention with the help of trusted friends. God can bring healing to these situations as well, but the actions that need to be taken are different than what we are discussing in this message.

Verses 8-9:

BRIDE

O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—
if you find my lover,
what will you tell him?
Tell him I am faint with love.

CHORUS

How is your beloved better than others,
most beautiful of women?
How is your beloved better than others,
that you charge us so?

The chorus functions in different ways throughout Song of Songs. Here, the chorus is a sort of poetic alter ego of the bride, a way for her to sort through her own thoughts, and it presents the first of two questions: How is your beloved better than others?" In other words, what do you really believe about your husband?

The question is phrased in an interesting way. You are the most beautiful of women, after all. Why do you care so much about this guy? Isn't he just another boorish man? She answers the question in verses 10-16:

BRIDE
My lover is radiant and ruddy,
outstanding among ten thousand.
His head is purest gold;
his hair is wavy
and black as a raven.
His eyes are like doves
by the water streams,
washed in milk,
mounted like jewels.
His cheeks are like beds of spice
yielding perfume.
His lips are like lilies

dripping with myrrh.
His arms are rods of gold
set with chrysolite.
His body is like polished ivory
decorated with sapphires.
His legs are pillars of marble
set on bases of pure gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as its cedars.
His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is altogether lovely.
This is my lover, this my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

Her speech is in a poetic style, but her point is this: "He is *not* like every other man. He is just as he should be—the man God has given me. He has captured my heart, and I have joined my life with his. He is my lover, and he is my friend."

Verse 15 of chapter 2 contained a warning to "catch the little foxes that spoil the vineyard." Little arguments, little hurts, little annoyances—every such moment of discord and frustration creates an opportunity to choose either to allow the problem to grow or to affirm the relationship. And on this night of separation and hurt, the bride chose to reaffirm that she loved her husband and that she would allow their struggle to deepen their love.

Continuing on to chapter 6, verses 1-3, the chorus asks a second question:

CHORUS

Where has your lover gone,
most beautiful of women?
Which way did your lover turn,
that we may look for him with you?

BRIDE

My lover has gone down to his garden,
to the beds of spices,
to browse in the gardens
and to gather lilies.
I am my lover's and my lover is mine;
he browses among the lilies.

We never learn where the groom went or what he did after he walked away from the bride's door, but here we see that his leaving was only temporary. He can no more break this relationship than she can. So when the chorus asks, "Is he gone? Is he the kind of man who leaves?" her answer is, "No, he is not. He is right here." As we saw in

chapter 4, she is the garden. He is attentive to her, and he hasn't gone anywhere at all, really. And she says, "I am my lover's, and my lover is mine." The relationship goes through a rocky period and comes out stronger than it was before.

Some people love to fall in love. They go head over heels for someone and think the other person can do no wrong. There is no discord, no inattentiveness, no difficulty. Of course, that is infatuation, not love, and it doesn't last. At some point love becomes a choice to bless the other person even if you're not so crazy about each other anymore. This distinction between infatuation and real love is at the heart of why God uses marriage as analogous to our relationship with Him. You may at first feel swept away by the Lord's goodness, and the feeling of floating in His presence seems like it will never end. But what happens when you break God's heart, when you stiffen your neck against His best for you, when you know that you have grieved His Spirit? Will He stay? Will He remain committed to you even when He has grievances against you?

Of course He will. And you will discover, I think, that you cannot leave Him either, even when He is not treating you the way you think He should, even when you are disappointed in Him. I am my Beloved's, and He is mine. He *will not* leave me, and I cannot leave Him. My heart is knit to Him, and my future is determined by my love relationship with Him.

So we find this language of belonging, of stress that produces new certainty of faith. I tell couples planning to be married that marriage is a school for faith. It teaches us to bless when we don't feel like blessing. It teaches us to draw on reserves of love that we can't manufacture naturally. It teaches us to make choices that are important because they are true, not because they are persuasive in the moment. Marriage is a school for faith, and I think the language of Song of Songs presents that lesson clearly.

In 1876, George W. Robinson penned the lyrics to a hymn entitled, appropriately, "I Am His and He Is Mine." The following lines from this hymn summarize well what we have seen in our passage today:

*Loved with everlasting love,
led by grace that love to know;
Gracious Spirit from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!*

*In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.*

*Heav'n and earth may fade and flee,
firstborn light in gloom decline;
But while God and I shall be,
I am His, and He is mine.¹*

Lord, thank you for the truth that conflict and struggle and life's difficulties are not ultimately destructive, but that they are given to us to grow, to learn, to go deeper. I pray that we will learn that in relationships in families and friendships, between parents and children, husbands and wives, and that we will learn that in relationship to You as well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

¹ "I Am His, and He is Mine." George W. Robinson, 1876

