

Song of Solomon 4

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[0 : 0 0] the words that we have in verse 16. So in Solomon chapter 4 and verse 16. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south.

Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.

The psalm of Solomon is a book that uses the language of natural love in order to stir up the affections of the Lord's people.

It's a book that points us to yearn for a taste of this love and for us to know, as we read earlier in that chapter, to know it as something that is better than wine.

Now you have noticed as we read the chapter that it very much uses the language of physical beauty in order to express the mutual delight that Christ and the believer, the church, have in one another.

[1 : 1 7] John Owen, when describing the psalm of Solomon, said that the matter of it is totally sublime, spiritual and mystical. This is very much a book that is bursting with rich allegorical imagery of the most beautiful relationship that is.

The relationship of Christ and his church. Sadly, many modern commentators have reduced this picture to a mere romantic love letter, saying that it's nothing more than a letter from King Solomon to an unnamed bride, and its sole purpose is to act as some kind of guide, as to an example, as to what a loving relationship should look like between a husband and a wife.

You know, for us to accept such a limited view of this beautiful song is indeed for us to have even a wrong view of Scripture itself.

You remember in Luke 24, when Christ met with the two on the road to Emmaus. In verse 27 of that chapter, we read that beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them, that is Christ interpreted to them in all the Scripture, the things concerning himself.

He interpreted to them in all the Scripture, that is from Genesis to Revelation, through the whole canon of Scripture, the things concerning himself.

[2 : 5 8] And so there he is. In the Old Testament, in the New Testament, he is there. Now this book of Esther is perhaps a prime example of this, because you may remember that not once in the book of Esther do we read of the name of the Lord being mentioned.

Yet none of us would say that the book of Esther is merely a nice little story about a girl who rose through the ranks to become a queen.

Of course, the book of Esther has a much deeper meaning because we can see in this book the guiding hand of the Lord in providence, the guiding hand of the Lord that preserved in this book the nation of Israel, which would, of course, in the fullness of time would be crucial for the coming of the Messiah himself.

And so it's important, as I touched on this morning, that we always read the Old Testament with an eye to looking for Christ in it. And so it is with the Song of Solomon.

Although his name is not perhaps explicitly mentioned here, there is absolutely no doubt that Christ is to be found on the pages of this book.

[4 : 27] Even when you go to the beginning of the book, we see the title of it, the Song of Solomon. Now the name Solomon itself means peace. And so here at the very outset of the book, we see the title of the book pointing towards the Prince of Peace himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And not only this, in chapter 1, verse 1, we read that this is the Song of Songs.

The Song of Songs, meaning it is the greatest or the supremest of songs. Now while the Bible does undoubtedly have such a high view of marriage, we cannot deny that and we must always remember that.

I think, nonetheless, we would run into problems were we to say that this, the greatest of songs, the Song of Songs was merely a romantic love song, a song that ranks higher even than a song about God's glory and that redemptive love that he has for his people.

Because the fact is that right throughout Scripture, the picture of marriage is often used as a metaphor for the union that the Lord has with his people.

[5 : 57] There are many examples that could be given, such as Matthew 22. Here we read of Christ saying that the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a wedding feast.

Meanwhile, in Revelation 19, we read of the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride, the church, has made herself ready.

As well as this, Christ more than once in Scripture, he refers to himself as the bridegroom. Remember in Matthew 9, 15, when answering a question about fasting, Christ replies, can the wedding guests, referring to his people, mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?

And so, friends, we're to understand this letter, this song, the Song of Solomon, in the context of Scripture as a whole, and in particular in the light of how we see the relationship of Christ and his people so clearly represented in the New Testament.

With this in mind, then, let us turn to our text this evening, which is found in verse 16 of the chapter that we read. Awake, O north wind, come thou south, blow upon my garden at the spices that off might flow out.

[7 : 19] Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits. Here the bride is asking for the wind to blow upon her garden.

And like so much of the song that is in this request, such vivid, such rich imagery, because the wind that she is praying for is indeed the wind of the Holy Spirit of the Lord.

And the garden that she's asking for this wind to blow on is the garden of her soul. We see often throughout Scripture the Spirit of the Lord being referred to as the wind.

Perhaps one of the most familiar of these can be found in the Gospel of John chapter 3 and verse 8. Here Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again.

After which he then goes on to say, the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it. But you cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes.

[8 : 30] So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. We cannot see the wind as it howls around us.

We can hear it even tonight. We cannot see the wind though as it howls around us. So how do we know that it's there?

How do we know that it is indeed a windy evening tonight? Because of course we can see its effects. we can see what it does.

No more so than here in the islands where we often see during the winter months things being damaged and even buildings being destroyed as the wind tears through them.

Yet we cannot see the wind itself. We can only see its power. And you know friends, so it is with the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 30] we cannot see the Holy Spirit. We cannot physically touch the Holy Spirit. But yet we can so clearly see His power.

You know, it's important what I said here, we see His power. It's important that we never ever refer to the Holy Spirit as an it. The Holy Spirit is of course one of the three persons of the Godhead and we never ever refer to God as it.

And so we can so clearly see the power of the Spirit when this Holy Spirit takes a sinner from darkness to light, from death to life.

I don't know if you, well I'm sure, I know in fact that you all do know a Christian. you know, a Christian perhaps in your family, perhaps your husband or your wife.

Perhaps you married them and they weren't Christians but yet they were converted. The wind of the Spirit blew upon the garden of their soul and all of a sudden or perhaps even gradually you were able to see the effects of this.

[10 : 47] You were able to see a change in that person's life. You were able to see a change in their desires, in their will. You were able to see that they weren't what they once were, that they hadn't been left unchanged.

You know, the Sorter Catechism tells us that that is what effectual calling is. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds and the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel.

And so just like the power of the wind can so quickly change the landscape around us, so too can the wind of the Spirit just as quickly change the landscape of your soul, of your heart tonight.

I wonder if he has convicted you of your sin and misery. I wonder if he has enlightened your mind and the knowledge of Christ and renewed your will.

Well, friends, if he has done this, this is a work that should not only be evident to you, but to all those around you, they should be able to see something in you that is different, something in you that is even otherworldly.

[12 : 25] Not that your personality changes as such, we are still the same person, but isn't it so that when the wind of the Spirit blows in our midst, they should see even just a glimpse of Christ in you and in I.

2 Corinthians 5, 17 tells us that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

But here in our text tonight, the Church of Christ has already had the work of the Spirit carried out within her. She's already had the work of the Spirit reconciling her to Christ, if you like.

So why is it that she's asking here for the wind of the Spirit to blow upon the garden of her soul? Well, to think about a picture of nature itself, like any garden, the garden of her soul is a garden that needs continual upkeep.

This is a garden that is so full of good things, full of, as we read, pleasant fruits and spices. Yet in order for this garden to grow and flourish, in order for this garden to be as fruitful as it can be, it needs to be nurtured.

[13 : 49] It needs to be cultivated. It needs to be worked at. I don't know if there are any keen gardeners here, but I'm sure we can all think of a garden that we knew to be beautiful in the past.

As I have been driving through scalping, I've noticed that there are an awful lot of lovely gardens. People really take pride in their gardens. They take pride to look after their gardens.

But sometimes, for one reason or another, we notice that a garden wasn't perhaps what it once was. We look at it and we see that weeds start coming through, that perhaps there aren't as many beautiful flowers as there once were.

Perhaps that beautifully manicured lawn is now overgrown, and for one reason or another, we know that this garden has been neglected.

It's become completely overgrown. And you know, so it is with the garden of our soul. Although the Spirit, it's true to say, the Spirit has taken us from death to life.

[15 : 05] Friends, that does not mean that the garden of our soul is to be neglected. Because when the Spirit works in us savingly, when the Lord sows that Spirit of regeneration in our hearts, there comes from this something that has never been there before.

The fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5, 22, 23, reminds us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are all the graces that make up this one fruit of the Spirit. This is the fruit that indeed grows in the garden of the soul of the believer tonight, making it such an attractive place.

Yet if we are, because we are sinners rather, and if we do not feed the garden of our souls with good food, if we do not tend to these graces, this fruit we will find will soon become stifled and hidden under weeds and suffocated by thorns and briars even.

1 Corinthians 3, 6 tells us that Paul plants in Apollos waters, but it is God and God alone that gives the increase.

[16 : 50] So friends, it's only the Holy Spirit that can make this fruit grow, and that is why we see this prayer from the bride to the bridegroom. This is an acknowledgement that she needs the Spirit of the Lord, she needs the wind of the Spirit to blow upon this garden so that this fruit will truly be ripened and of good use.

Yes, it's hard labour at times cultivating our spiritual life, it's hard graft, but friends, we needn't go it alone. We have the Holy Spirit to help us if only we would call upon him.

But notice it appears here that the bride is asking for two winds, two spirits if you like, awake, O north wind, come thou south.

We know of course that there is but one Holy Spirit, and so here the bride is asking the Spirit to do two different things. Firstly, she says, awake, O north wind.

Notice the word awake. The suggestion here is that perhaps the Holy Spirit is asleep. But of course we know that that is not the case, that it's not possible.

[18 : 10] No person of the Godhead ever, ever sleeps. But isn't it true to say, friends, that often our own awareness of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, that that sleeps, that our own knowledge of Christ in us becomes weary and even dim.

And so here we see the bride not asking for the Spirit to awaken, but rather her own awareness of the Spirit to awaken, for perhaps she is in a spiritual slumber.

And often the word awake here in Scripture is used by the Lord's people when dealing with him. We read of that in Isaiah 51.9. We read awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

What the believer is really asking is that they will be awakened by the Spirit of the Lord. And isn't it true that at times in our Christian walk we can even feel anethatized towards the things of the Lord, unaware of his blessings, unaware of the possibilities that flow from his blessings.

This north wind was a powerful wind and it could be so cold, so biting. We read in Proverbs 25.3 that the north wind brings forth rain.

[19 : 47] It caused the clouds to be emptied in order to make way for better weather. And in Job 37.22 we read that fair weather comes out of the north.

And so here the bride is calling for all these clouds to be swept away so that the sky once again will be clear. we can have the darkest of clouds hanging over the garden of our souls.

These clouds of our sinful humanity, clouds that are overshadowing those graces of our souls so that we and others can hardly see them.

Clouds that are blocking out that sunlight so that these graces aren't able to grow and flourish. Clouds that can at times seem oh so dark.

They can seem so dark that you can hardly even remember a time without them. The fact is, although these clouds are there, the sun is always there behind them.

[21 : 03] We just can't see it. I was reminded of this recently when flying in a plane. When you go up above the clouds, you find yourself seeing nothing but blue skies for miles and miles beyond, the sun shining brightly in the sky.

And then when you come and the plane comes to make its descent and to land, you go down through the clouds and then under the clouds and often times you find yourself in a place that is so dark and so grey, a place that is so dull and so bleak, a place that seems completely different to the place that you have just been high above the clouds.

Friends, the sun is still there, but the fact is, you just can't see it. it's covered by these clouds. You may be sitting tonight under a myriad of dark clouds that are separating you from God, they may even be clouds of providence that are out with your control.

Friends, you know behind each and every dark cloud of providence is the sun of righteousness himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the darkest cloud of all is the cloud of unrepentant sin, the cloud of unbelief, the cloud that has these words echoing around it, I will not have this man to rule over me.

Friends, this is a cloud that will never ever lift, a cloud that will get darker and darker, a cloud that will get heavier and heavier, but yet a cloud that is nothing compared to the darkness that awaits the unbeliever throughout all eternity.

[23 : 13] Is that the cloud you are sitting under tonight? Is it true that you have not even yet caught a glimpse of the life-giving light that comes from the sun of righteousness?

Well, whatever the dark clouds are in your life tonight, whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian, friends, we are to go to the bridegroom, we are to ask that the Holy Spirit may blow the north wind of conviction upon our souls.

This may be an uncomfortable, chilling wind as it rebukes us, as it awakens us, but yet it is one that is also necessary.

That reminds me of a story, a story that I'm sure some of you have heard many times, but it is a story that illustrates this point, the story of the kitchen maid.

The story goes that the minister, Hector, Reverend Hector MacPhail of the Solace, many, many years ago, he was making his way down to the General Assembly in Edinburgh.

[24 : 28] He was travelling from the north of Scotland down to Edinburgh, and as was customary, he stopped by in an inn for the night, somewhere in Inverness Shire, and he, before he went to bed that night, he asked that everybody in the inn would gather together in a room.

In those days, that would have been perfectly normal, gather together in a room for evening worship. And as everyone gathered together in this room, he asked the innkeeper, is everyone here?

To which the innkeeper replied, yes, everyone is here except for the kitchen maid. She is not dressed appropriately, she is filthy, she is not suitable to come and to join us here in this worship.

Mr. McPhail said, ah, she is the one who I want to come in here, go and fetch her. And so he did. He fetched the kitchen maid and she came in and she sat in on the evening worship.

And as the worship went on, after the worship, Mr. McPhail, he spoke to the kitchen maid and he began to question her.

[25 : 45] And as he questioned her, he was able to see her complete and utter ignorance towards the things of the gospel. She knew nothing of prayer or of the Lord.

And so to cut a story short, he said to her, I want you to do one thing for me. I would like you to pray to the Lord these words.

He explains what prayer was. I would like you to pray to the Lord these words, show me myself. Show me myself.

And if you pray these words, when I go to Edinburgh I'll get a handkerchief for you and I'll take it back to you as a gift, something that was perhaps to be desired in those days. And so she agreed to do what he asked her and off he went to Edinburgh.

And on his way back he came back and he stayed in the inn again. And he once again gathered everyone in the room for worship before they went to bed.

[26 : 47] And once again the highland kitchen maid was missing. Where is the highland kitchen maid? He asked the innkeeper maid. To which the innkeeper replied, well since you have left she has done nothing but cry and cry and she has taken to her bed.

And so Mr. Macphail went to see the highland kitchen maid and he spoke to her and asked her what the matter was. To which she replied, well I prayed that prayer, Lord show me myself and I simply cannot cope now with what I see.

The Lord had given her a glimpse of the wretchedness of her own soul that she was forced to take to her bed. That was the cold wind of conviction.

But he didn't leave her there because he said now I would like you to pray another prayer. Show me thyself. And so he left the highland kitchen maid and he went back up north and never heard any more of her for years until one day he heard a knocking at his door and there she was.

And she asked him, do you remember me from all these years ago? Yes, I do, he said. Well she said, I prayed that prayer, show me thyself. And the Lord revealed himself to me in a wonderful way so that she too now was able to say that she was a child of God.

[28 : 29] Yes, she had the cold north wind of conviction blowing upon her soul. That was so necessary, that is so necessary for you tonight if you are not a Christian.

Why do you need a saviour if you don't know what you need to be saved from? God. But then she had that warm soothing south wind that she called for then when she prayed show me thyself.

That warm soothing wind that revealed to her the preciousness of Christ. Christian friends, isn't that the wind that we love so much?

the wind that we crave, the wind that gladdens our heart, the wind that reveals to us our precious saviour.

Thomas Manton said that God's mind is revealed in scripture, but we cannot see anything without the spectacles of the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 36] And is it not so when this warm south wind blows upon our soul that we can see Christ even clearer than before? He's magnified to us in a way that warns us to the very core of our being.

Don't you long for more of this individually in your congregation, in all of our congregations? Don't you long that we would as Church of Christ, instead of going through the motions of religion day in, day out, that we would enjoy that joy, that joy that is to be found when the Spirit gives us that lively knowledge that my beloved is mine and I am his.

Don't you want that? That warmness when we enjoy fellowship with his people more than we ever, ever did before?

Those times when he makes his word alive to us, when he gives us that freedom at a throne of grace, when we come to him in prayer, well surely friends, it's time that the Church of Christ once again began giving the Holy Spirit his place, depending on him, depending on him and him alone, not gimmicks, not man-made innovations that may draw people to church but are based only on worldly wisdom, that we would depend on the Holy Spirit to reveal to us Christ.

But notice the bride asks for both. She doesn't care which wind blows upon a gardener's soul, whether it's the cold north wind or the warm south wind, but yet this is surely a good sign because sometimes in our Christian experience we can feel that God is not speaking to us at all, that he's not revealing to us himself either the cold wind of rebuke or the soothing, warm wind of comfort.

[31 : 57] And you know, that is a fearful thing in many ways because the Lord tells us in scripture that he chastens those whom he loves.

And so to experience the north wind or the south wind, it's surely a sign to us, reminder to us that we are children of God.

You know, the most fearful thing is not to have a desire or even an awareness of any of the winds of the spirit blowing upon our soul, whether comfort or rebuke, and oftentimes this is due to the fact that our conscience has been seared, as it were, with a hot iron.

Scripture speaks of that. We're not aware of any promptings of the spirit because our conscience has been numbed by our sin and our disobedience.

Now, this is something we can all relate to. We know what it's like when we burn ourself. We perhaps burn our finger or our hand.

[33 : 10] At first, it's very sore, but then after a while, it's numb so that we can't feel anything. And so it is for the Christian.

when we, as it were, flirt with sin for want of a better phrase, when we go back to things that we know are sinful, perhaps we'll be convicted the first, the second, the third time, but if we continue in that sin, the fearful thing is that our conscience will be seared, we'll be numb, and we'll be left to ourselves.

You know, when this happens, it will be evident not only to yourself, but to those around you. They will see that you weren't what you once were, you weren't walking the Christian life as you once did.

But if you are feeling this night, perhaps the cold wind of rebuke in your experience, take heart, take encouragement, whatever sin it is you are finding yourself in, please seek to turn from it as quickly as you can, run from it, but yet take comfort in the fact that the Lord is still rebuking you.

This is surely a sign of life, a sign that perhaps you still have that desire to be in renewed communion with him. And you know when you have that renewed communion, others will see it.

[34 : 51] Because when the wind of the Spirit blows in the garden of our souls, we read here that the spices will flow out. Those spices are of course the graces in our heart, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Do you know in the same way that spices, when you get them in their raw state, the same way that they need to be beaten for the smell, the aroma, to come forth, they need to be worked at, so too do the graces in our heart need to be exercised, to be worked at before this fragrance of Christ will be evident around us.

These graces cannot be worked up by ourselves, so we need, we absolutely need the Spirit to allow that sweet fragrance to carry.

The house that I live in, in Skiggerstown Ness, it was once my grandparents' house, and outside the house there is a honeysuckle plant, and it's been there ever since I was a child.

And sometimes when I pass this, if there's a little breeze, the smell of the honeysuckle plant comes and it reminds me of my grandparents, it takes me to another time in my life, and isn't it funny the way smells can do that, you smell something that takes your mind to something else.

[36 : 33] grace. And so it is when the wind of the Spirit is truly blowing upon the garden of the soul of the believer, the aroma of Christ will be with us.

And what an aroma that is, what a sweet smelling savour that is, and what a witness that is for him. You know, we read of the greatest benefit of all of this in the last line, let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits, and into chapter 5, verse 1, drink, yes, drink deeply, beloved ones.

Because when the wind of the Spirit allows these graces to come forth, he has promised that indeed, he will sup with us, and we with him.

Isn't that wonderful? We bemoan the times that we're in. We say, ah, the lack of the Spirit. Friends, the Spirit is there.

The Holy Spirit is always here. It's us who change. He changeth not. So, friends, rather, and I include myself in this, rather than us, grieving the Holy Spirit, or even quenching the Spirit, keeping the blessing away, not only from ourselves, but from our fellowships, by allowing the weeds of this world to come into our lives.

[38 : 12] let us call upon the Spirit, so that he may, even tonight, water the garden of our souls, and so that we can unashamedly welcome him in, welcome our beloved in, to eat his pleasant fruits, that we would drink deeply, that we would draw with joy from the wells of salvation, so that he may truly delight in us as his redeemed.

I wonder if he is delighting in you and I tonight, as his redeemed. Non-Christian, unconverted friend, I wonder, are you even aware of what is growing in your garden?

Tonight, the garden of your soul. soul. Are you aware of the overgrown wilderness that lies there in, that has been in the soul of every believer at one time in their life, the thorns, the thistles, the weeds that are keeping Christ from coming in?

Are you aware of them? Well, if you're not, friends, you need to pray that the Lord will blow that north wind on the garden of your soul, so that you will be convicted of that sin.

And you know, you needn't stay in that state. You needn't stay another day like that, because friends, there is tonight a divine gardener who is more than willing to plant his grace in your heart.

[39 : 54] If only you will let him, won't you let him? Because if you do, his grace and his mercy, will cover the will cover the weeds, they will cover all that that is choking your life.

And that south wind will blow upon your soul so that you will see the beauty of Christ for yourself, not only for time, but for all eternity.

That is what the blood of Christ does. cleanses us from all our sin. Awake, O north wind, come thou south.

Blow upon my garden that the spices thereof might flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits.

Then let it be so, for our good, but ultimately for his glory. Amen. And we pray that he would bless to us these few thoughts.

[41 : 04] We can conclude now saying to God's praise from Psalm 67. Amen. Amen.