

Work Yet To Do

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[0 : 0 0] mindful that we will for the foreseeable future be unable to complete or to finish a short series on the Song of Solomon, which we began some weeks ago. I'm swiveling with whether or not to actually take a passage from it tonight, particularly when the presbytery meetings have been held yesterday and today to discuss the present crisis have been held.

The principal part made mention today in Presbytery of a verse that had come to him in terms of whether or not we were taking the correct decision to shut down public services and to encourage people to keep themselves, as it were, within their homes and away from potential infection.

And he shared this verse, Isaiah chapter 26 and verse 20. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.

Hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment until the indignation be overpassed. Now the context of that chapter 26 in Isaiah is, apart from the fact in the opening verses, as you'll see if you turn it up, that the Lord is encouraging his people to depend upon him, I will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, verse 3, because he trusted in thee.

Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. That then goes on to talk about how the Lord brings down them that are high, and how there is a certain punishment, a certain chastisement for sin and for the neglect of him.

[1 : 4 6] And that's partly what the chapter is about. And yet there is a contrast with the Lord's people who are kept safe throughout it all, despite the sins of the nation which are punished, despite the chastisement which even they are visited with.

And we saw in recent weeks, as we've been looking at Exodus and the plagues of Egypt, how for many of the plagues, the children of Israel too were likewise afflicted by them.

Even though they were not the object or the target in those plagues, they nevertheless were afflicted by them. And likewise, we find ourselves also afflicted and threatened by this virus, which may or may not be the Lord's judgment or chastisement or anything like that.

We can't say that. It may well be. If it is, it is less than we deserve for our sins as a world, as a human race, for the way we have turned against the Lord. But certainly it is a time of testing.

Certainly there's a time when our faith is being put to the test, when our normal ways of practicing that faith are being curtailed, and when we are perhaps going to lose for a time the opportunity of that which ought to be precious to every child of God, but which perhaps often we may have taken for granted.

[3 : 1 0] And with that in mind, this passage, this particular chapter of the Song of Solomon, seemed actually quite appropriate to continue with. First of all, it begins in what is really a continuation of the end of chapter 4, where the bridegroom, the beloved, is saying he is coming to his garden.

As the bride had said, Awake, O Northwin, come thou, say, blow upon my garden, that the spices that are of my may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits.

He says, I am coming to my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. It's all perfumed and spiced. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey.

That which was sweet and nutritious and had various medicinal properties too. I have drunk my wine, which is heady and intoxicating, with my milk, which is root for the bones, and of course a nutritious food in and of itself.

So there is that which is sweet to the taste, that which is good for food, that which is intoxicating. It is all in there. Eat, O friends, drink ye drink abundantly, O beloved.

[4 : 19] And so we ought, likewise, to delight with the Lord and in his company and in that which he gives. But nevertheless, we find the bride, the beloved spouse, as it were, here, as each of us is guilty of at times falling asleep in terms of our watchfulness, in terms of our relation to the Lord.

I sleep, but my heart waketh. You know, and the flesh is heavy. The spirit is willing. My heart waketh, but the flesh is weak. The flesh is heavy.

Just as the disciples fell asleep in the garden of Gethsemane. So she sleeps here. I sleep, but my heart waketh. It is the voice of my beloved that knocked her, saying, open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled.

And we see again here, as we mentioned in previous chapters, how there is, if you like, the intensity of the love of the spouse for his beloved bride.

And with, at the same time, the chastity and the purity, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled. There is nothing carnal, lustful, fleshly in the sense of this particular love.

[5 : 34] It is a pure love, with an intensity and a desire that even human marriage and human married intimacy can't really compare to.

And so he is calling, he's knocking, as it were, at the door of her heart. And she's been asleep, but she wakes up, and he's saying, my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.

And we might think, okay, he's outside, the dew is landing upon him, but remember, this is all pointing us to Christ. When can we think of a time when Christ's head would have been pouring, as it were, with the dew, the sweat, as it were, of the night?

Well, obviously, Gethsemane springs to mind when his head, his skin, must have been drenched with the sweat that was, as it were, great drops of blood.

And why is that relevant to this? Because here, in Gethsemane, of course, he is preparing himself for the ultimate act of love, the ultimate sacrifice of himself for his beloved.

[6 : 39] Remember how Paul writes in Ephesians 5, of how husbands must love their wives and be prepared to lay down their lives for them, if need be. They are called to love them in such a way as will be prepared to sacrifice their very selves.

Why do they not actually call upon to love husbands in the same way, only to submit to them? Oh, one hopes, of course, they would love them as well. But Christ here, of course, has a love for his bride, the church, which in a sense, she can never fully reciprocate.

Because all the love in the world that we can give to Christ can only be all that we are and all that we have. And all that we are and all that we have, even including our soul, doesn't even come close to the depth and intensity and divinity of the love that Christ has to us.

We love him because he first loved us, but our love is not even a pale reflection of his. We think of Christ then, as it were, knocking on the door to arouse his beloved, his bride.

But she is not coming out to him, not yet. She is not yet ready to come seeking him, although he is longing for her. He is giving of himself. His head is filled with dew, with the drops of the night.

[8 : 03] And there he is in Gethsemane, pouring with the sweat that is great drops of blood as he prepares himself for the ultimate sacrifice to secure the safety and the salvation of his beloved bride.

But what does she say? I have put off my coat. How shall I put it on? I have washed my feet. How shall I defile them? And this, of course, is our initial response to the call of Christ, to the gospel.

Oh, but Lord, come on. I've got things on the go. I've got my life the way it is. I've put off my coat. It's going to mess things up if I come and follow Jesus. It's going to interfere with my schedule, my life, my work, and so on.

I don't want this really to, I don't want to mess things up. Of course I love you. My eyes sleep and my heart wake up. But come on, don't ask me to put on my coat again.

Don't ask me to mess up my feet when I've just washed them. Don't ask my life to become disturbed by having to open up to Christ. And that is the initial response that I imagine every single one of us made when we felt the call first of Christ.

[9 : 13] Life is, how are we like it? We have everything just so. We want our lives just to continue as they are with me at the centre of it in Christ. Yes, he's somewhere he's out in the fringes.

He's outside the door. He may be knocking, he may be asking to come in. We may be ready to bring him in in our good time. But just not yet because we're just not quite ready.

my beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door and my bowels were moved for him. The more he's almost opening the latch, the more we yearn towards him.

And finally we give it in. I rose up to open to my beloved and my hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock.

When we come to open up to Christ, we recognise that what we are opening up to him is not simply fragrant but it is, as it were, drenched in the scent of his death.

[10 : 09] Because myrrh, remember, is the spice of the tomb. It is that which speaks of his, not so much his embalming but rather the wrapping of the funereal strips of cloth around him.

The entombing, the spice, the almost embalming we might say but it's not embalming in that sense but the preparing for burial. It is the spice of the tomb.

That, of course, which one of the wise men brought to the infant Jesus. My hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock.

It is bitter in its perfume but sweet at the same time. How can things be both bitter and sweet at the same time? Well, they can be. You know, you can think of foods that are sort of bitter and sweet at the same time.

Things like marmalade and that and so on. But this, we've got this, this spicy which is bitter in its scent and yet sweet. And it is bitter to think of Christ's death but it is sweet to know that he died for us if we are trusting in him.

[11 : 19] As we seek to open the lock it is only through the death of Christ that we're able to do it. I opened to my beloved but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was born.

My soul failed when he spake. I sought him but I could not find him. I called him but he gave me no answer. Well, why would this be a case? Why if we're opening up to Christ, doesn't he?

Doesn't he just come in? Why doesn't he come right away? Well, of course, he's not going to be just found so readily. He wants to, as it were, whet the appetite. He wants there to be that desire to be drawn out that as he has come seeking us so we are to be encouraged to go seeking him.

I opened to my beloved but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone. My soul failed when he spake. I had the words, as it were, ringing in my ear.

It's opened to me my system. I love my love, my undefiled. And I wanted him and I sought him but he gone. My soul failed when he spake.

[12 : 23] Still his words are sweet to me. Still the living word of God becomes more sweet to us as we go seeking him but he is just out of reach.

I sought him but I could not find him. I called him but he gave me no answer. It is not that the case but every seeking soul, the very fact of our needing to seek him, the very fact of our wrestling as it were in our state of uncertainty when we want Christ but we're not quite ready to commit.

We want to have him but we don't know quite where to look for him. We desire that which he offers but we're still in a state of turmoil. It is still night with us.

We are still in a sense half asleep. We want him. We open to him but he's not just right there on the doorstep. We have to go look in. The watchmen that went about the city found me.

They smoked me. They wounded me. The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. Now this of course is quite a contrast with what we found previously where in chapter three and verse three the watchmen that go about the city found me to whom I said saw ye him whom I so loveth?

[13 : 35] It was but a little that I passed from them but I found him whom I so loveth. Now you could preach any number of sermons on the contrast between these two reactions from the watchman.

There is no suggestion in chapter three that there's any kind of conflict or any kind of difficulty but she's in for a hard time with them now and their reaction to her and her reception of their hands is far from pleasant if it's positively dishonourant and we might think well why is that the case?

You know why is it the case that they are harsh against her? Now when we think in terms of the watchmen and what is their purpose some have taken some commentators take the watchmen to be as it were the gatekeepers of the Old Testament church those who watched upon the walls those who jealously guarded the privileges of the people of Israel with the law and the testimony and the regulations of the Pharisees and so on and these when one seeks the beloved as opposed to merely the law merely the rules merely the keeping of the regulations then then they react against that as they did against Jesus himself and they smite and they wound the bride the beloved here because she's seeking him she's not seeking simply to do what they say she is seeking himself they smote me they wounded me the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me they disordered her in many ways by treating her as they ought not to have treated her there's no suggestion of complete inappropriate behaviour but certainly disrespect here and unpleasantness towards her why this should be well it's as we say suggested by some commentators that this is the reaction of the Old Testament legalist gatekeepers against that which is purely of Christ seeking the beloved and to begin with of course the initial encounter with that law and regulation is not negative the law is given to point us to Christ and whilst it is still doing that whilst it is a help rather than a hindrance not getting in the way there's no conflict but when it comes down to the question of is it the beloved or is it the law and the gatekeepers and the legal regulations then there is the conflict and we are smitten we are wounded but we're not killed we're not knocked out altogether

I charge you O daughters of Jerusalem if ye find my beloved that ye tell them I am sick of love I am fainting for longing after my beloved I long after I've been making myself ill have we not been there have we not come to that stage in the past where we were positively failing in health driving ourselves almost ill with the desire and the lack of clarity and lack of peace that we are I am sick of love if ye find him tell him because I can't find him I can't find him anywhere if ye find him tell him I am sick of love and then we might say that we have this kind of little bit of testing testing by the daughters of Jerusalem by those also in the church those who also love him who you might see are saying okay well tell us about him tell us why you love him you know when somebody professes faith or wants to come forward at the church session the elders are meeting and say tell us a little bit about how you came to this place what is it that

Christ is to you and this is what they are really doing why do you charge us with this what is your beloved more than another beloved what is Christ to you more than all the other things of the world and then she begins to wax lyrical about him now you'll notice that this is comparatively unusual in the song of usually it is the lover himself who is waxing lyrical about the beauty of his bride and all the anatomical detail and descriptions of her and all the ways in which her beauty is brought out by the different aspects of her it is usually him describing her but here in this instance she is describing him what is thy beloved more than another beloved beloved my beloved is white and ruddy the cheapest among ten thousand now you might think well that's a contradiction in terms how can he be both white and sort of ruddy with sort of reddish complexion well he's white in the sense of his purity and his perfection he's ruddy in the sense of this bursting with good health remember what it said about

[18 : 30] David he was a handsome well favoured and ruddy because he had had all the fresh air health bursting out of him as it were when Samuel first encountered him as a youth he was a good looking ruddy youth because all the colour was there in his cheeks and in his skin my beloved is white in his purity in his perfection and ruddy in his health and in the goodliness of his confidence the cheapest among ten thousand no matter how many you've set before me I would always hone in upon him he is the best of the best his head is as the most fine gold his locks are bushy and black as a raven another apparent contradiction in terms either he's golden headed or else he's black his raven headed well remember that to have black strong hair would be considered in the middle eastern context to be a sign of again bursting vitality and health but why is the most fine gold someone suggested that this is a reference to to christ's godhead as opposed to his manhood remember that in his godhead he is this perfect all-confident all-powerful divine being his head is as the most fine gold remember that when daniel described to nebuchadnezzar his dream and he dreamed this image and the head was of gold and then the shoulders and the chest and so were of silver and then it was all really descending kinds of metal as the image went down but the head was the most fine gold he said you're this head of nebuchadnezzar you're a king of kings well nebuchadnezzar is a king of kings how much more is christ his head is as the most fine gold he is king of kings he is god of gods this is his head as opposed to we might say his heel remember that his heel is emblematic of his humanity which is bruised by the serpent remember that prophecy to eve at the beginning you see shall bruise his head that is the serpent's head but that serpent will bruise his heel christ in his manhood is wounded he is killed but that killing is of divine effect it is a divine sacrifice even though it is his manhood which is put to death his heel is not like his head his head is as the most fine gold his locks are bush black as a raven again is bursting with good health and strength even though this gold symbolises his godhead his godliness his eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers and waters remember again the dove was the one bird that was clean and suitable for sacrifice he had these gentle eyes and yet in a sense eyes that can see everywhere his eyes are perfect his eyes are the eyes of doves by the rivers and waters washed with milk perfect in their purity fitly set there is no imperfection they see everything they are beautiful and gentle to behold his cheeks are as a bed of spices as sweet flowers in other words you go close to the lover you smell the scent as you put your head on his cheek and it's as a bed of spices as sweet flowers his lips like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh now when we think of the lips of the saviour here remember in chapter 1 let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth what is the mouth of christ it is that which speaks his word his lips

like lilies again the symbol of purity dropping sweet smelling myrrh again speaking of his death all of christ's ministry is speaking of his death think of how many times when the disciples still didn't have a clue what he was talking about how often he told them the son of man must be betrayed into the hands of sinners offered up to the gentiles they'll spit upon him they'll kill him they'll crucify him and scourge him and the third day he'll be raised again from the dead he spoke of this again and again and again and a amount of transfiguration remember it says in luke's account of the gospel how moises and elijah are there with him they spake of his decease which he should accomplish at jerusalem his lips like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh the spice of his entombment they speak of his death his hands are as gold rings set with the barrel not only gold but bejeweled everything that he does there is a glory there is a beauty there is a dazzling wonder about it his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires even his bodily presence positively sparkles with that which is the most perfected in humanity now of course we're told that he had no form nor comeliness that we should desire him but remember that in the eyes of the beloved and the besotted everything looks different

I'm sure we can all remember whether it's school or some other place you know you get this crush on a person and you become absolutely besotted you become convinced that theirs are the most beautiful hands oh look at the way they walk isn't it fantastic you know and yet maybe six months earlier they could pass them and they come ready you're completely indifferent but something happens you develop this besotted crush oh their hair is so wonderful oh look at the shoes isn't that just great oh they walk this way oh what a wonderful flow that must be they walked up and you're just absolutely besotted and so everything they do looks fantastic now even though we are told of Christ he had no form nor prominence no physically spectacular appearance that wowed anyone yet in the eyes of the beloved he is all things in this his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires his legs are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold his countenance is as leavening like all forests from which the house of God the temple is constructed his countenance is as leavening speaks of the furnishing of the temple of God excellent as the sea rose his mouth is most sweet when he speaks it is with beauty it is with comeliness it is the perfection of the word of God in the beginning was the word and the word was with

God and the word was God the same that was in the beginning with God all things were made by him without him was not anything made that was made his mouth is most sweet yea he is altogether lovely everything about him is perfection this is my beloved and this is my friend oh doctors of Jerusalem what a friend we have in Jesus and when we see the beauty and the wonder that is in Christ we wonder at ourselves how we can ever be so dozy and worldly minded as to when he is knocking at the door of our heart how did we not spring up and open to him but we were still in a fleshly condition and the more we come to focus upon him the more his beauty dazzles us the more we become filled with the beauty of his holiness and all we can think of and all we can see is Christ and it doesn't matter that the law batters us and wounds us and takes away our veil or strips us in a sense of some of our modesty we're quite content to throw away our dignity and throw ourselves at his feet like Mary did before like a woman anointing his feet with the perfume just throw ourselves at his feet because he is out all in all this is my beloved and this is my friend oh daughters of Jerusalem now and so this song goes on but in a sense this is a song which of course tonight and in the weeks ahead we won't be able to finish we're not able to finish in the weeks to lie ahead immediately anyway because we're not going to be meeting we're not going to have the opportunity the song is there the song is complete but we're not going to be able to sing it in the way that we wanted to we are not able to sing all of this song there is song yet to be sung and this in a sense is a typical illustration of our life and our walk with Christ we have sung so much of it we have worked our way through so much of our life from the state of fleshly worthiness through all the way to resigning him and longing after him and longing for more this is my beloved this is my friend oh daughters of Jerusalem

I can't speak enough about it it's all about Christ and yet it is as yet an unfinished song because our days here are as yet incomplete whether we spend them physically in the house of God worshipping with others or whether it's worshipping in private or as families or as individuals it is sung yet to be sung it is not yet complete as these chapters are not yet complete there is more yet to be sought there is more yet to be found it is a song as yet unfinished not because the song is incomplete you know we can turn the chapters we can read all the way through to the end of chapter 8 it's always there you know it's complete it's just we haven't got there yet now the number of your days and mine is already known to the Lord it is already fixed by the

[29 : 27] Lord and we are so far of the way through it but it is not yet complete this is a song as yet unfinished this is a work as yet not completed because we have life yet to live we have days yet to fill we have work yet to do we have worship yet to offer and we have a song yet to sing a song not of Solomon not even of Moses and simply of the Lamb a song of the beloved a song of Christ that we have yet to complete but by God's grace will continue so to do day by day month by month year by year till we come together again and then on thereafter day by day until the very last one or until he comes again let us pray