

September Communion 2022 - Saturday Evening

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2022

Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Amen. Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words that we read in a Song of Solomon, chapter 5, Song of Solomon, chapter 5, and reading verses 2 down to 8 again.

Where we read, I slept, but my heart was awake, a sound my beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I had put off my garment, how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet, how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not. I called him, but he gave no answer.

The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. They beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him, I am sick with love. The Song of Solomon is an ancient love song that was written by Solomon, the son of David. It's a song that celebrates human love, the love between a man and a woman. It's a song which celebrates royal love, the love between King Solomon and a Shulamite bride. And it's a song that celebrates divine love, the love that exists between the Lord and his people, his church. And over our next two services, we're going to be considering this fifth chapter of the Song of Solomon as we prepare to come to the Lord's table tomorrow. This evening, we're looking at verses two down to eight under three headings. We're looking at the approach, the absence, and then the appeal. The approach, the absence, and the appeal. First, we have the approach. Look at verses two and three, where the bride focuses on the approach of her beloved. In verse two, the bride records her beloved's approach. We can begin by noting where the bride is at the beginning of verse two. She's sleeping, but at the same time, she's awake. Her heart is awake.

She is half awake and half asleep. She is drifting off, but her mind is still alert. And we can also note what the bride hears in verse two. As she's drifting off to sleep, she hears a sound. And she recognizes it to be the sound of her beloved knocking.

[2 : 37] Some people have a very distinctive knock. Your minister doesn't believe in knocking on your door when he comes to your house. He just wanders in and makes himself comfortable. I know that from experience, but some people have a very distinctive knock. And this man is one of those people. As soon as the bride hears that knock, she knows that it's him. But she doesn't simply hear him knocking, she also hears him talking. He's appealing to her to open the door and to let him in. And as he appeals to her, he addresses her using the most elevated of language. He calls her my sister, emphasizing their close relationship. Calls her my love, emphasizing his deep affection for her. He calls her my dove, emphasizing her gentleness and her grace. And he calls her my perfect one, emphasizing that he sees no fault, no flaw, no spot in her. And as he stands knocking, he announces that his head is wet with dew, his locks with the drops of the night. He's not come to her on a bright morning, not come to her on a warm afternoon, not come to her on a cool evening. He has come to her on a cold and damp night. But nothing and no one is going to keep him back from her. Nothing and no one is going to hold him back from her.

Whatever the weather might be like, he is going to come. And in verse 3, the bride records her attitude to her beloved's approach. She has just heard this most beautiful request. Her beloved has appealed to her to open the door. He has addressed her as my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one. And he has announced that not even a cold and damp night is going to keep him away from her. And the beautiful request is met with a blunt refusal. The bride tells him that she has put off her garments and is reluctant to put them on. She tells him that she has bathed her feet and is unwilling to soil them. In other words, she's saying she's gotten ready for bed and she can't be bothered

crossing the room, can't be bothered opening the door, can't be bothered letting him in, can't be bothered spending some quality time together. And you know, friends, as we consider these verses, we are being reminded that the Lord desires communion with his people. The Lord desires fellowship with his people. The woman in this song hears her beloved knocking on the door and talking to her. He appeals to her to let him in. He addresses her as my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one. He announces that nothing and no one is going to keep him back from her. And that is how Jesus is with his people. He wants to have fellowship with them.

He wants to have intimacy with them. He wants to enjoy closeness with them, wants to enjoy communion with them. He's the one who tells that church in Laodicea that he is knocking on the door because he wants to sit down, eat with them, have fellowship with them. He's the one who makes every effort, endures every hardship, experiences every pain and discomfort just to be with his bride, just to be with his people. One older writer has said, he stands and knocks and entreats as if it were a favor to himself to obtain admission. I'll say that again. He stands and knocks and entreats, as if it were a favor to himself to obtain admission. This is no Jesus who tolerates his people.

This is no Jesus who grudges spending more than five or ten minutes with his people. This is a Jesus who rejoices over his people as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, as we see in Isaiah 62. This is a Jesus who is not ashamed to say to his people and of his people, you are mine, and I am so glad that you are mine. But as we consider these verses, we've also been reminded that the Lord's people can have very little desire for communion with him.

The Lord's people can have very little desire for fellowship with him. The woman in the song hears her beloved's request to let him in, and she refuses. She tells him that she's washed, gotten ready for bed.

[7 : 23] She tells him it's not a convenient time for her. And sometimes that is how the Lord's people can be toward him. We become lukewarm. We become lazy. We become lethargic. We become indifferent. We become insensitive to Jesus. We hear him saying, let's spend some time together. And we say things like, but my living room needs tidied. My croft needs a wee bit of work. My social media needs some attention.

The duties of the day are very pressing. It's been a tiring week, and I need some rest. Like the woman in this song, we can come up with all manner of reasons and excuses for not spending time with Jesus. Now, I know that I am speaking to someone in this room tonight, at least one person, and I know that person very well. I know that person better than probably anyone else in this room knows this person, and that person is myself. But I wouldn't be surprised if I was speaking to others in this room as well. People who can have little desire at times for communion and fellowship with the Lord who stands and knocks. But we move from this approach to the absence. Look at verses 4 to 6.

The bride now focuses on the absence of her beloved. In verse 4, we see the arousal. We can note what the bride sees at the beginning of verse 4. She has just refused her beloved's request to open the door.

She doesn't want to spend any time with him, but he wants to spend time with her. This is his sister. This is his love. This is his dove. This is his perfect one. This is the one whom he doesn't want anything to separate him from. And he now puts his hand to the latch of the door. He's desperately trying to get in. He's not taking no for an answer. And we can note what the bride feels about this. Look again at verse 4. As she becomes aware of her beloved's determination to be with her, her heart is now thrilled. That word thrilled refers to an intense longing, an emotional longing.

[9 : 43] She suddenly comes to her senses, and she realizes how foolish she's been. How on earth could she possibly be holding back from him? But we move from the arousal to the action in verses 5 and 6.

The woman rises, beginning of verse 5. She's been half awake, half asleep, too lethargic to cross the room, open the door, be with her beloved. But she now rises. She gets up from her bed, and she dips her hands in liquid myrrh. She hastily puts on some perfume. She wants to make herself as presentable as possible for him. You know what it's like. Well, maybe you don't, but if you're like me, you might get sweaty and smelly in bed. And if you're sweaty and smelly in bed, and someone was to come into your house, you would want to get yourself presentable for them. And that is what she's doing.

She's been sweaty and smelly in bed, and she puts the perfume on, so she'll be more presentable for him. And then she opens the door. This is the door that her beloved has been knocking on. This is the door that she had initially refused to open. She now rises and opens the door, but we move from the action to the absence in verse 6. Upon opening the door, the bride discovers that her beloved has removed himself. She's opened the door, and she's expecting to see him standing there, maybe holding a bunch of flowers, maybe even a box of chocolates. But she's disappointed. She's dismayed.

She's devastated as she finds that he has turned away. And look at the words she uses. He's not simply turned away. He's gone away. He's removed himself. And we see her reaction to his removal. Her soul, her inner being fails. She now finds herself hardly able to breathe. She starts searching for him, but she can't find him. She starts calling out for him, but she receives no answer. She had been pushing him away through her laziness, through her lethargy, through her lukewarmness, through her insensitivity, through her indifference, and now he's gone. He's left. He's nowhere to be seen. He knows when he's not wanted.

And you know, friends, as we consider these verses, we've been reminded that there can be times when the Lord will withdraw from his people for a season. There can be times when the Lord will withdraw from his people for a season. The woman in this song experiences her beloved turning away and leaving her. She had refused him. And now he removes himself from her so that she is made to look for him. And that is how Jesus will sometimes deal with his people. You see, friends, when we speak about the Christian life, we need to understand it, think of it in terms of union and communion with Jesus.

[12:50] Our union with Jesus is our relationship with him, our being bound and connected to him. Our communion with Jesus is our fellowship with him, our enjoyment of his presence, his love.

And what we need to remember, friends, is that while our union with Jesus can never, never, never change, our communion with him. Our communion with him can.

Benjamin Skow writes, While our union with Christ cannot be hindered or broken, the sweetness and intimacy of our fellowship with Christ can be hampered through sin.

Much like a marriage can be hurt when a covenant partner commits wrong, so too can our communion with Christ suffer when we fail to demonstrate our love to him through obedience. Each moment of willful sin can erode and chip away at our communion with Christ.

Think of that. Each moment of willful sin can erode and chip away at our communion with Christ.

[14:07] And perhaps that's been the experience for some of us in recent days, recent weeks, recent months, recent years. There were once times when we knew the Lord's presence and love.

Days when that was the most real thing in the world to us. Days when the Lord's love for us was more real to us than even the love that we thought we had from our husbands or our wives.

Days when the Lord's love for us.

Days when the fellowship was impeded and in need of repair. My friend, if you are sitting here tonight and you are not enjoying a sense of the Lord's presence and love, if you are experiencing something of the Lord's absence, I want you tonight, friend, to take heart.

What you're going through does not mean the Lord has finished with you. He has not washed His hands off you. He has not broken His covenant with you. He has not annulled and dissolved His union with you.

[15:39] Julian Hardiman writes, That sense of absence is given to you by the Lord to make you seek after Him all the more because you feel so incomplete without Him.

Friends, are you willing to seek Him? Willing to call out for Him? Willing to do all that you can to see that communion, that fellowship with Him repaired and restored?

I find it a great tragedy, and maybe you do as well, when you meet a Christian and they're not enjoying communion with the Lord. And it's a case of, well, I'm no longer enjoying communion with Him, so I may as well just wander further and further.

He withdraws Himself. He withholds that sense of His presence, not so that we would disappear in despair, but that we would seek after Him, that we would go after Him, that we would call out for Him.

That's the absence. And then third and finally, we come to the appeal in verses 7 and 8, where the bride now focuses on her appeal concerning her beloved.

[16:53] In verse 7, we see the assault. We can note who the bride meets at the beginning of verse 7. She's gone looking for her beloved, and she's calling out for Him. But instead of finding

Him, she is found, and she is found by the watchman of the city.

We can also note what the bride experiences in verse 7. The watchman beat her, and they beat her so severely that she is left bruised. They go further, and they remove her veil.

She is now exposed and left in a shameful condition. It's clear that in their treatment of the bride, the watchman don't recognize that she is the bride of the king. It's night.

The only women who went about the streets at night would be prostitutes. Any respectable woman, any honorable woman, would be at home, either with her parents or with her husband.

And so the watchman punish the bride, thinking that she's been engaging in a dishonorable, distributable activity. They cannot see her as being the bride of the king.

[17:54] We move, though, from the assault to the appeal in verse 8. The bride's undeterred by this assault, and she now speaks to the daughters of Jerusalem. The daughters of Jerusalem are the young women of the city.

These are the friends of the bride, the companions of the bride, the contemporaries of the bride.

And she appeals to them to bring a word to her beloved. She adjures them.

She urges them to make a solemn promise, a binding oath, and she asks them to speak to her beloved if they find him. She's been seeking him, but up until now she's been unable to find him.

She's been calling out for him, but up until now there has been no answer. But she is hopeful that her friends, her companions, her contemporaries might have more success.

And isn't it interesting that she still identifies the king as, did you look at it? Please look at it, verse 8, my beloved.

[18:56] She is still using that covenant language, that marriage language. She recognizes, yes, the communion with her beloved has been ruined, but she also recognizes that her union with him is still intact.

He is still her beloved. They are still married. And she tells the daughters of Jerusalem what they are to say if they see her beloved.

In 1975, Bob Dylan recorded the album *Blood on the Tracks* that described his estrangement from his wife, Sarah. And on one of the songs, he sings, And to think of how she left that night, it still brings me a chill.

And though our separation, it pierced me to the heart, she still lives inside of me, we've never been apart. And here we find the bride saying to her friends, saying to her contemporaries, If you see my beloved, tell him I am sick with love.

Tell him that I am fainting, that I am failing, that I am falling apart without him. Tell him that I cannot go on without him. Tell him that my life just isn't worth living when he's absent.

[20:40] And the stage is now set for what is going to follow in verses 9 through to 16 that we'll focus on tomorrow. But as we consider these verses, we're being reminded of the importance of appealing to others to pray for us when we are feeling that the Lord is absent.

That's how this closes. The importance of appealing to others to pray for us when we are feeling that the Lord is absent. The woman in this song appeals to the daughters of Jerusalem.

She tells him that the king is still her beloved, even though there were times when her behavior seemed to suggest otherwise. And she asks them to tell him that she is sick with love.

She is a broken shell, a broken shadow of what she used to be and wants to be. She wants him.

She needs him. She loves him. She misses him. And all she is asking her friends, her contemporaries, the daughters of Jerusalem to do is to bring her case to him.

And that is what we are to do, friends, when we are aware of a breach in our communion with Jesus. You know, there is always a danger that when a Christian is aware of a break in their communion with Jesus, that they begin to break off having communion with his people.

[22:01] I see it time and time again. A person is no longer feeling close to Jesus. And so they begin to disengage from life and fellowship with his people.

But this song gives us an example and an encouragement to go to the daughters of Jerusalem. Go to Christian friends. Go to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Go to partners in the gospel saying to them, pray for me. Bring my case to the true and better Solomon. Bring my situation to the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Tell my beloved that I am a shell and a shadow of what I used to be and want to be. Tell my Jesus that I want him. That I need him.

That I love him. That I miss him. William Cowper, a man who is no stranger to dark days in the Christian life, wrote a poem entitled, Seeking the Beloved, where he writes, To those who love the Lord I speak, is my beloved near.

[23 : 16] The bridegroom of my soul I seek, oh, when will he appear? Such Jesus is and such his grace. Such Jesus is and such his grace. Oh, may he shine on you.

And tell him when you see his face. I long to see him too. Did you catch those words? Tell him when you see his face.

I long to see him too. I long to see him too. Cowper was honest enough to let his friends know that he was feeling the Lord's absence.

And he was humble enough to say to them, pray for me. And as we close, I simply want to ask, are you willing to appeal to others to pray for you when you're feeling the Lord's distance, the Lord's absence?

Brothers and sisters, let's stop the masks. Let's stop the charade. Let's stop wandering into church services saying, I'm doing fine when inside we are not doing fine.

[24 : 35] Let's be honest enough. Let's be humble enough to say, if you see the face of my beloved, if you see Jesus, tell him I long to see him too.

And friends, are we willing to make ourselves available to pray for others when they're experiencing this? Can I ask you, maybe some of you older Christians, maybe some of you elders, are you making yourself available to others who are struggling to enjoy communion with Jesus?

Is there someone you're missing from this building tonight? And you know they're not doing well spiritually.

Are you going to go to them and say, let's seek the beloved together?

Let's pray. Oh, heavenly Father, we can find ourselves so often feeling so far and so distant from Jesus.

[25 : 54] And yet we praise and bless you that in the seasons when we find that we are not enjoying that communion like we once did, that we are reminded that he will withdraw and withhold himself for seasons, not so that we would despair, but that we might seek earnestly after him, knowing that we are incomplete without him.

And we pray that this evening, each and every one of us might be willing to seek after the beloved, seek after Jesus when we are feeling that absence.

And that we would be willing to appeal to others, our friends, our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our partners in the gospel, when we are feeling that absence, that we would drop the charades, that we would put down the masks and simply say to one another, help me.

And we pray that we might be making ourselves available to others who may be feeling that absence, may be experiencing a loss in their communion with Jesus. May we go to them, not in judgment, but in grace, and do all that we can to help them see the face of Jesus.

We pray that tomorrow you would bless us as we gather around the table and that it would be a time when we enjoy communion and fellowship with each other and with this Jesus in whose precious name we pray these things.

[27 : 41] Amen. Let's close by singing to the Lord's praise, the words of Psalm 13, the Singed Psalms version.

Psalm 13, the Singed Psalms version. How long will you forget me, Lord? Will you forget always? How long, Lord, will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze?

How long must I be sad each day in deep perplexity? How long will my opponents stand in triumph over me? David begins this psalm full of anguish, but he has an assurance at the very end of the psalm that even in his anguish, he is trusting the constant love, the steadfast love, the covenant love of the God who has been good to him and whom he knows is good all of the time.

Psalm 13, to God's praise. How long will you forget me, Lord?

Will you forget always? How long, Lord, will you hide your face and turn from me your gaze?

[29 : 21] How long must I be sad each day in deeper perplexity?

How long will my opponent stand in triumph over me?

O Lord, my God, consider me and give me your reply.

Light up my eyes, For I will sleep The sleep of those who die Then would my enemy declare At last I've laid him low And so my voice Would sing for joy To see my hope

Overflow But still I trust Your constant love With joy I will Extol the Lord Who has been good to me
Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit be with each and every
one of us now and for all time as we pray in Jesus' name.
[32 : 17] Amen. As a words I was afraid of God God honorable As a words I am I am I I am I am I
am I'm I am You I am I am I am For time I amone ace Are