

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CALL OF THE CROSS AFTER RESURRECTION

I. THE CROSS AFTER RESURRECTION AND THE MAIDEN'S FAILURE

A. The Calling (5:2)

Song of Songs 5:2 says, "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." By this time, her own work and life have ceased. She is like one who is asleep; there is no further activity, work, endeavoring, struggle, effort, or anxiety. She is perfectly at rest. The cross has not only dealt with all her sins, but has dealt with all her flesh. Sin is no longer active, and the self is no longer active. The whole outward man has been brought to a state of cessation. Even when she does something, she does not feel that she is doing it herself; she feels that she is a bystander. Indeed, she is asleep. But this does not mean that she is completely motionless, thoughtless, void of belief and activity, and void of work and living. The resurrection life of the Lord is in her, and the resurrected Lord Himself is dwelling and living within her through the Holy Spirit. Although the outward man is silent, the inward man is active. Here we see a complete separation between the outward man and the inward man. Outwardly we can be asleep, but inwardly we are awake and are not sleepy at all. This matches Paul's word, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). This is the expression of perfect fellowship with Christ. A person who is perfectly one with the Lord is very quick, alert, and full of feelings. He can feel even the slightest voice or movement of the Lord. The inner man never sleeps. Whenever the Lord speaks, the maiden immediately hears, and she immediately identifies the voice of her beloved.

What does the Lord do now? He "knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister." In this book, the Lord first revealed Himself as the King because He is after the throne in our heart. Then He was a caller, leading the maiden out of the inner walls into the resurrection life. Finally, He reveals Himself as the Bridegroom, having a perfect love relationship with the maiden. Now a completely different revelation is unveiled: "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." What kind of picture is this? This is clearly His experience at Gethsemane. There His head was indeed filled with dew! That night His head was filled with the drops of the night (Luke 22:44)! Here He reveals Himself as a son of sorrows.

In the past, we saw the cross for redemption. We also saw the cross for identification. We have seen the suffering and death of the cross, and we have seen how the cross delivers us from the world and self. We have seen the victory at the cross and our conformation to the cross. After a believer has seen these things, he may think that he has reached the peak experience and that he will then advance step by step toward

resurrection and glory. Little does he realize that there is another aspect of the cross that he has not experienced. Even if he has a little experience in this area, it is very shallow. Although he knows about the suffering of the cross, he does not know the extent of the suffering. Although he has realized the conformation, that is, the molding of the cross, he does not know what shape this mold will conform him to. The Lord now calls His believers to go through an experience of the cross that they have never before experienced, or that they have only experienced in a shallow way.

The garden of Gethsemane speaks of God's rejection and everything associated with this rejection (Isa. 53:4b). We may understand the redemptive aspect of the cross, but there is still the aspect of His outward rejection by God. This aspect subjected Him to extreme shame. Of all the previous sufferings, we can still find some glory in them, because God is still there. But He was not only rejected by man, but was seemingly rejected by God as well. It seems as if everything that came upon Him was a chastisement from God. This is God's hand. Because of God's smiting, He was rejected, and this was the greatest shame He bore.

The Lord does not invite us to participate in His redemptive work. But He charges us to have fellowship with Him in the other aspects of His cross. The problems we encountered in the past revolved around sin, the world, Satan, and the natural self. Although we encountered the suffering and conformation of the cross, we were completely unfamiliar with God's rejection and man's shame. Now the Lord is knocking and saying, "Open to Me." This means that He calls every believer to open up their heart to Him once again and to receive once again the Lord who is filled with the drops of the night. The maiden must still learn what it means to be rejected by God and to suffer the deeper misunderstanding and shame of the cross. He calls her "sister;" He beckons the life of God within her. "My love" indicates her knowledge of God's will. "My dove" speaks of the nature of the Holy Spirit, while "my undefiled" speaks of her purity, chastity, and consecration. However, He does not say "my spouse," because He is waiting for her to answer Him before He can be assured of her status as a spouse, one who is in complete union with Him.

The Lord begs her to open herself. Previously, she opened herself to receive the Lord as King. Now the Lord wants her to open herself and receive Him as a son of sorrows. Now the Lord leads her into the deepest aspect of a life of suffering together with Him and in conformation to His death. Yet the Lord will never force anyone to take a way that he does not want to take. Therefore, He will only knock and ask; He has to wait until the believers become willing in themselves.

B. Excuses (5:3)

Verse 3 says, "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" The call in verse 2 is beyond many believers' expectation. They do not realize that there is the aspect of shame to the cross. They are not inexperienced as to the cross. They may have had deep experiences of the cross already. Although they have suffered a little for the cross and met some persecution and shame, they have always felt that the cross was their glory, their life, and their power. It never occurred to them that the cross would become their shame, that

they would not only lose worldly fame, but also their spiritual renown, that others would consider that God has rejected them, and that God would put them through trials and strip them of comfort and sympathy from those whom they know, who would think that they were smitten by God. They may have suffered shame from the world, but spiritual shame is something new to them. This kind of misunderstanding will touch their feeling in a deep way, because it has to do with the relationship between God and them. Only then will they know what it means to "fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24).

How unfamiliar is this calling, yet how cruel! No wonder many shrink back. The maiden may think that God's glory is more important than everything else. In the past, she may have tried to glorify God's name in her life and work. If God allows her to be misunderstood, stripped of her good name, shamed, and considered by others as being in an argument with God, how can she glorify Him any longer? Perhaps she is not thinking of herself as much as she is thinking of God's glory. But she does not realize that her concerns revolve around how she can glorify God. She must be stripped by God to the point that even this good self-intention to glorify God is removed. The cross must work so deeply on her until she is content with the portion that God has allotted for her and until she lets God take care of His own glory.

With those who have heard such a calling, there may be another problem. They may be concerned about God's work. Through the cross they have experienced, others have been attracted to them to learn of the Lord's way. The maiden's past experience of the cross made her a channel of life; those who wanted to follow the Lord had to go to her. But if she answers this new call and allows the cross to bring her to the place of shame, will she not lose her position and opportunities in the work? The past experiences of the cross have attracted others to her. Will not the future experience of the cross turn people away from her? Will anyone draw near to her again? Will anyone want to learn the way of the cross from her? These thoughts may bring hesitation to her footsteps.

Therefore, she answers, "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?" In her outward walk, the cross has put off the old man with its deeds. Should she rise up to accept the loneliness and shame of the cross and to bear the misunderstanding, like putting on a coat that she has put off? Is it not enough for a person to experience the cross to the extent of being genuinely delivered from the old man? Many believers who have reached this stage do not see that there are two aspects to the cross, the negative aspect and the positive aspect. The maiden knows resurrection and the cross, but she only knows the negative aspects. Her attention is on the cross's work in dealing with the old creation; she does not see how the cross also deals with the new creation. She only sees the cross in its work of deliverance; she does not see the cross in its work of initiation. She may misunderstand and think that these works belong to the realm of resurrection. Actually, they belong to the realm of the cross. On the positive side, the cross brings a stamp of shame, suffering, and misunderstanding to the new creation. The Lord Jesus' life is a life in the new creation. Yet do we not see a mark of suffering in Him that comes from the cross?

"I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" We have taken a bath and are clean before the Lord. When we walk through the world, we come into contact with the dust and dirt of the world, yet we are cleansed through a continual cleansing. The maiden may think that she needs to preserve her cleanliness, to no longer defile herself, and to not give the appearance that she has stopped progressing but is regressing instead. All that she sees is the preservation of her own cleanliness; she does not see that the defilement one receives in opening the door to the Lord is not really defilement at all. She must put on her coat and be willing to be defiled again before she can open the door. But this does not imply putting on her old man once more or a defilement by the world once again. Rather, it means a putting on and a defilement by misunderstandings. The refusal here is a refusal of the best thing and a settling for the next best thing.

This is a picture of a person's contentment in his own experience, and a failure to see the importance of experiencing Philippians 3:10 in a full way. Subconsciously, the self has crept in. The maiden sees only herself. It seems that her past experiences in God's work and glory have occupied a place in her already. Her questions indicate that she does not want to change her present spiritual condition. But the Lord's calling interrupts our present condition. All spiritual progress involves a change of our present order. This is where the price lies. An attachment to spiritual ease is often the reason behind a rejection of higher callings. When we are spiritually at ease and our conscience does not condemn us concerning any error, and when we find ourselves having many spiritual experiences that issue from the Lord's death and resurrection, we are reluctant to pursue after the goal Christ has set for us. We prefer to live in the same way, not spending additional effort to pursue new things and not losing our present peace.

C. Opening the Door (5:4-5)

Verse 4 says, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. 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." For the bowels to be moved means that her deepest feelings are touched. Her questions are not a rejection, but an indication of the weakness of the flesh. Her will has fully been subjected to the Lord. The expression of delay is caused by her natural constitution. Inwardly, she has no problem at all, but she is somewhat feeble outwardly. Hence, the Lord encourages her with new invitations. If her heart were indeed hardened, the Lord would not have pursued her. Therefore, He "put in his hand by the hole of the door." This is a calling, not a chastisement. This hand is the hand that once embraced her, the hand that was once under her head. This hand is the nail-pierced hand. The Lord beckons her once again with such a hand. Putting the hand through the hole of the door means that the Lord is doing all that He can to reveal a part of Himself. Through the revelation of His hand, the Lord hopes that she will begin to think about Him. His hand represents His heart, and it reveals Himself.

All spiritual experiences are the result of the attraction of Christ. Men must see the Lord's revelation before they will rise above their present condition of ease to advance further with Christ. Those who truly see the Lord cannot fail to be moved in their bowels. But how few are those who are moved by the Lord! How many are there who can tell the difference between being touched by the teaching and being touched by the Lord?

The maiden rises to open the door. Because of the Lord's attraction, she is willing to accept the cross of shame, just as she was once willing to accept the cross of power. The hands that open the door, the hands that signify faith and obedience, surely drop with myrrh. Here we see not only the power of the Lord's death, but the smell of His death. The Lord's life, which has passed through death, is in her hands and it is rising up as a tide, enabling her hands to open the door. Even the lock of her will cannot help but be permeated with the smell of the Lord's death.

D. Withdrawal (5:6)

Verse 6 says, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." A person who is experienced in the Lord's dealing does not experience discipline from God when he is disobedient. God's discipline comes to him only after he is obedient. When a person is obedient, the Lord will show him the evil of disobedience. (With a beginner, the discipline comes before obedience, and discipline brings him into obedience. With an experienced person, discipline comes after obedience and gives the person the taste of the bitterness of disobedience.) In the maiden's feeling, her beloved is gone once again. Formerly, she lost the Lord's presence because of her foolishness. Now the pain she experiences is in her spirit. Her spirit seems to be bound in darkness, and there is no light. She recalls how she was beside herself when the Lord first called, and how her soul was raptured away to Him. When He spoke, her heart was ravished. Now she hates herself and does not know why she cannot have the outward strength to match her inward desires. She hates the fact that she gave a false excuse which caused Him to hide His glorious face. She can only look and call; she cannot find Him, and He will not answer. This search is different from the one she had before. This search is not on the streets or in the broad places, but before God. Even prayer seems to be useless.

E. Wounded (5:7)

Verse 7 says, "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." This time she does not go out to look for the watchmen, and she does not ask them. Rather, they meet her. They wonder how a person as beautiful as she, who has gone through as much change as she, would lose her beloved. They may try to help her, but their words only serve to hurt her more and increase her pain. She yearns for consolation, but she receives only wounds. Mrs. Penn-Lewis quoted a good verse regarding this portion: "For they persecute him whom You have stricken,/And they recount the pain of those whom You have wounded" (Psa. 69:26). They do not know how to take care of her problems. They think that she must be wrong if the Lord has withdrawn. They do not realize that she has suffered enough blows already; they think that their rebukes can help her. They give her more blows through their words. At this time, she cannot help but proclaim, "Reproach has broken my heart, /And I am sick;/I looked for pity, but there was none; /And for comforters, but I found none" (v. 20).

Her pain does not stop here. Not only are the others not able to help her or comfort her; they joke about her condition. Those who are responsible to keep watch over her do not cover her; rather, they publicize her affairs. As a result, she loses her veil, and she is without any covering; her

shame is exposed. Her failure becomes public news among the believers. She is indeed like Job, who tried to find a friend who would help him, but ended up with those who condemned him.

These keepers are the ones who take responsibility in the house of God. Spiritually speaking, they ought to be her guides. But often even the discernment of a spiritual person can be wrong. Our brothers' attitudes toward us may be wrong many times, but this is something under the Lord's permission; the purpose of it is for us to become conscious of our own failures. If we go on with the Lord according to His will, He will have a way to deal with our brothers. When we fail, however small this failure may be, the Lord will allow our brothers to deal with us more severely than He Himself will deal with us.

F. Seeking Help from the Daughters of Jerusalem (5:8)

Verse 8 says, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love." When the maiden cannot find help from spiritual men, she seeks help among those who are less advanced than she is. When she feels that she has offended the Lord and has lost His countenance, in her desperation she tries to find help even from the daughters of Jerusalem. Her words amount to an admission of her failure and that, if possible, they should pray for her. Her sense of failure is so deep that she feels that even babes in the Lord can render her some help. She is not ignorant of their immaturity, and she realizes that their fellowship with the Lord is not perfect. This is why she says, "If ye find my beloved." She knows that they may not find Him. Yet in her deep remorse and helplessness, she hopes to find one or two persons who can render some help. Her own prayers seem to go unanswered, and she now turns to others.

She wants to convey the message, "I am sick of love." She used this expression once before, but her condition was different than it is now. She had been in the midst of an intimate tide of fellowship, but now she is in a time of dryness. It is not surprising for a person to speak such a word at a time when feelings run high. But when darkness is all around and there are contrary feelings, it is not easy to speak such a word. This proves that she has made a considerable advance in the life of faith. She has learned to take control of her environment, and she can control her own feelings. This love sickness does not arise from an overindulgence in love, but from a hunger for love.

G. The Question of the Daughters of Jerusalem (5:9)

Verse 9 says, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" Although the daughters of Jerusalem do not have deep experiences in the Lord, and although they are not filled with the life of the new creation, they can see that the maiden is the fairest among women. The humility, holiness, and glory of the new creation are admired and acknowledged by all, even by those who do not possess them. Although the maiden no longer sees the countenance of her beloved, she is nevertheless the fairest among women. She has not lost her beauty.

It is never appropriate to consider Christ in the way of comparison, for He is beyond comparison. Yet in the eyes of ordinary people, comparisons are unavoidable. Their eyes have not yet seen His absoluteness; therefore, they can only know Him by comparison. Actually, this Beloved is far more than any other beloved. This word also shows that though these women are the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they have not received a personal revelation of the Lord. They can only receive the reflected light that shines out from her.

H. The Maiden's Impression of the Beloved (5:10-16)

Mr. Darby said, "It is, I judge, a fine moral perfectness of thought that the bride never speaks of the Bridegroom's perfections to Himself as if she were to approve Him; she speaks of Him fully as expressive of her own feelings and to others, but not to Him. He speaks freely and fully of her to herself as assuring her of His delight in her. When we think of Christ and our relation with Him, this is beautifully appropriate" (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, J. N. Darby, Vol. 2, p. 265).

God uses the questions of other people to bring out the maiden's impression of the Lord. This causes the revelation which she once received to shine within her again. This spontaneously recovers her to her initial position. The revelation we have of Christ through the Holy Spirit may become blurred, but the wonderful thing is that it will never be lost. The maiden is still the teacher of the daughters of Jerusalem. Even in her failure, she is still stronger than the daughters of Jerusalem in their time of victory.

Verse 10 says, "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." At the very beginning, she speaks of her beloved in a general way. The word "white" in the original language denotes a kind of bright and shining whiteness. This speaks of His purity and His separation from sinners. Yet His whiteness is not a dead whiteness or a pale whiteness, but one that is white and ruddy. This means that He is full of life and power (in the same way that David was a man ruddy in countenance, cf. 1 Sam. 16:12). Throughout His life, He was a man full of power and life. From the time He was twelve years old until today, while He sits at the right hand of God, He has never been short of strength.

The word "chiefest" in the original language means "lifted up as a banner" or "banner-carrier." This means that Christ is the uplifted banner among tens of thousands of people. He is the One on whom all eyes are set. Christ is our banner, and we look to Him. He is also like a banner-carrier. This means that He is the crucified Lord. "When the adversary comes like a flood, /The Spirit of Jehovah will lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59:19). The standard refers to the cross. Hence, the Lord Jesus' being the banner-carrier refers to His being the slain Lamb. Wherever He goes, tens of thousands follow Him, and He is beyond comparison. After the maiden covers the general descriptions, she goes on to meticulously describe the revelations and impressions she has received of the Lord.

Verse 11 says, "His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy, and black as a raven." The "most fine gold" refers to His divinity. He possesses God's life and God's glory. "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). God has

established this Christ as our Head. Everything that is of God is in Him. Nothing that is of God is absent from Him. Hence, if we are "holding the Head," we can grow "with the growth of God" (v. 19).

"His locks are bushy, and black as a raven." To be black as a raven signifies His eternal power. When He manifests Himself as the Ancient of Days, He displays His white hair (Rev. 1:14). But what is portrayed here is His eternal and unfading power; therefore, His hair is black. When the Bible describes a man's condition as being degenerating and fading, it speaks of his gray hairs (Hosea 7:9). But our Lord does not have any gray hair. He is "the same yesterday and today, yes, even forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Verse 12 says, "His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set." The eyes express the sentiments, and these sentiments are intimate sentiments. Man's words and letters can express sentiments that can be felt from a distance. But the sentiments of the eyes cannot be felt unless a person is very close. The most beautiful thing about doves is their eyes. "By the rivers of waters" speaks of their wetness, "washed with milk" speaks of their whiteness, and "fitly set" speaks of their orderliness. The Lord's eyes express His sentiments toward us, and to the believers these eyes are as beautiful as doves' eyes. They are full of vigor. They are not dry, they are like those by the rivers of waters. They are distinct and clear, as if washed with milk. They are fitly set and have a healthy vision; they never make a mistake through faltering eyesight.

Verse 13 says, "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh." His two cheeks once suffered man's smiting (Isa. 50:6) and were reviled by men (Matt. 27:30). It is no wonder that the believers consider His cheeks as a bed of spices and as sweet flowers, beautiful as well as fragrant.

"Lips" denotes the words that come from His mouth. How pure are these words, and they are as fragrant as the droppings of myrrh. "Grace is poured upon Your lips" (Psa. 45:2). It is no wonder that men praised Him and marveled at the words of grace that came from His mouth (Luke 4:22). The droppings of myrrh do not mean just grace; they are related to His death. This denotes the grace that issues forth from His death. His lips drop myrrh; every word of grace that comes out of His mouth is based on His death. Whether it is, "Your sins are forgiven...Go in peace" (7:48-50), "He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47), or "Rise and take up your mat and walk" (Mark 2:9), all these words are based on His death.

Verse 14 says, "His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires." The word "rings" is the same word as "folding" in 1 Kings 6:34. The purpose of the folding is to prevent something from slipping and being lost. The gold rings tell us that the works of the Lord Jesus are capable of accomplishing God's will. They will not fail halfway, because all the works issue from God. Therefore, the rings are gold. "Beryl" is mentioned a few times in the Old Testament, including Ezekiel 1:16 and Daniel 10:6. In both places, the meaning is stability. In the former verse, though the Gentiles reigned, God's governmental wheel (made of beryl) still turned. In the latter verse, we see the Christ of God (whose body is beryl) arbitrating

the destiny of the world. Hence, both the gold rings and the beryl speak of the stability of the Lord's work.

The word "belly" is the same as the word "bowels" in Songs of Songs 5:4. This means that the Lord is a man of deep feelings. These feelings are directed toward His people. "Ivory" is not like gems, which are without life. In order to have ivory, there must first be sufferings or even death. This signifies that the Lord's feeling for His people comes from His suffering and the great price He has paid. "Bright" can be translated as "wrought work of." A wrought work is a fine work. This shows us that all His feelings are not shallow or casual. "Sapphires," according to the Bible, are "the body of heaven in his clearness" (Exo. 24:10). These sapphires overlay the perimeters. This means that when His feeling comes into contact with us, the contact is under the control of heaven.

Verse 15 says, "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars." In the Bible, the feet indicate movement, while "legs" signify an upright posture. "Marble" is translated many times in the Bible as "fine linen." Here it signifies His righteousness. "Pillars" signify gravity. This means that our Lord and all He has are unshakable because of the righteousness He has established. All those who have followed Him cannot fail to have this impression. In the maiden's description of her beloved, she mentions gold three times. This means that the thoughts in His mind, the works of His hands, and the stability of His feet are all of God. God controls His whole being. He is a totally submissive person, who fully satisfies God's heart. This is the One whom we know. "His countenance is as Lebanon." He is higher than the earth, and He is living in the high places. Everything about Him speaks of Him as a heavenly person. "Excellent as the cedars." He is a man, yet a glorified man. Just as the cedar tree far transcends over all other trees, He is the only glorified man among all men.

Verse 16 says, "His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." Finally, His mouth is mentioned. The word "mouth" is not just the ordinary mouth, but the mouth with special reference to the taste. This word is the same as the word "taste" in 2:3. This is very different from the lips. The taste refers to the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus. It means that everything from God is first tasted by Him before being transferred to us. Everything of God is first stored in Christ and then dispensed to us through Him. This is His mediatorial work, and it is very sweet. After we have known Him in this way, we cannot help but acknowledge that everything is of God and through Christ.

At this point, the listener's heart cannot help but be warmed, and the speaker's heart cannot help but be even warmer. In reviewing the way we have taken, and considering the Lord whom we confess, we cannot help but exclaim, "He is altogether lovely." Anything that we speak of concerning Him is altogether lovely. Those who have not yet followed the Lord in an absolute way should realize that this is our Beloved! This is our Friend! Can we be blamed for seeking after Him?

This description of her impression of the Lord is in a sense a description of the very Lord she knows. It is also a description of what she has received of the Lord. It is also a description of her union with the Lord and the fellowship that has resulted from this union. Since she has seen the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, she is reflecting His glory like a mirror and is being

transformed to the Lord's image, from glory to glory. By the end of her speaking, the sun has dawned upon her soul. Her words are full of feelings. It is as if she is singing and proclaiming, "He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend."

I. The Question of the Daughters of Jerusalem (6:1)

Verse 6:1 says, "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee." After hearing her testimony, it is natural that the daughters of Jerusalem would want to pursue after Him. Here we see a person in the new creation, who is being filled with the freshness of the new creation. The Christ she knows is very different from the Christ that others have preached according to their own ideas. It is no wonder that there is power and attraction, and no wonder that they still consider her as the fairest among women and join her in seeking after Him. Since He is so lovely, where is He now? This is what the questions imply. The repeated question which they pose, "Whither is thy beloved turned aside?", implies that a barrier exists between the maiden and her Beloved and that this is the reason He has turned aside. Since she knew of His loveliness in the past, and since they are ready to seek Him, she should be able to tell them where He is now. This is the implication of their words. They have a sense that when she speaks of her Beloved, it is different from when others speak about their beloved.

J. The Maiden's Reply (6:2-3)

Verse 2 says, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." Originally, the maiden sought help from the immature women, hoping that their beseeching would lead her to the place of her beloved. But after she presents her own testimony and after her attempt to help others, she suddenly receives light and the location of her beloved becomes clear. She can now say, "My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." The garden, which belongs to Him, is just herself (4:16—5:1). She suddenly becomes clear that He has never left. She does not need to ascend to heaven or descend to Hades. The Lord is near her, even in her mouth and in her heart. Although He seemed to have turned away when she delayed in her obedience, actually He only retreated from her feelings; He is only showing her the pain of the withdrawal of His countenance. In reality He is still within her. There is no need for her to be in a state of panic. All that she has to do is to open herself to her Beloved, on the one hand, and confess her own failures and ask for forgiveness, on the other hand. As to the feeling of His lost presence, she should hold onto God's word with a calm mind, and she should believe that He is still within His garden and prepared to reveal Himself at the proper time once again. Although there is still a sense of rebellion and apparent estrangement, she should nevertheless rest on God's word and immerse herself in such a word. She should realize that God's faithfulness is surer than her own faithfulness. No fleshly pursuit will bring about her recovery. Many times, it will only bring more confusion. The inactivity of the believers often causes them great harm. Yet their fleshly pursuit often

leaves behind large scars as well. Therefore, the way to recovery does not lie in these ways.

The way to the maiden's recovery is first her testimony. She does not stop testifying faithfully for the Lord just because she thinks that she is not faithful. Without realizing it, she is attracted by God to turn away from herself. Therefore, she can say such things about the Lord. This is her way of "looking away unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2a). In thinking about His person, grace, work, faithfulness, and love, she subconsciously recovers the light she had lost.

While she is near the point of despair, she tries her best to help others. Although she feels that she has lost the fellowship herself, she hopes that others would know His preciousness and fellowship with Him. Although she speaks of her past revelation, does not the Lord quietly hearken when the saints speak one to another concerning Him? Naturally, the Lord will reveal Himself to her at these times. Although she is hungry, others are hungrier than she is, and when she satisfies others, she spontaneously is satisfied herself. Here we see how she is being delivered from herself. Her sickness lies in her spiritual darkness and depression. After she is attracted to turn away from herself, her symptoms go away.

After she is enlightened, she realizes that she is actually speaking to herself when she is speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem. Although she senses the estrangement in her feeling, she discovers that during the long period of estrangement, He was still in His garden. The garden is singular in number, which means that it signifies herself. The gardens that are subsequently spoken of are plural, which signify the saints. She says that He is in her heart, as well as in all the saints' hearts. The word "beds" is also plural, which means the same thing that we previously mentioned. When the expression "bed of spices" was used before, it referred to the two cheeks. This means that the Lord is eating His excellent fruits in His garden, and He is also enjoying the beauty of His believers. He is shepherding the believers within their heart. He is gathering the lilies, that is, the pure joy which is of Himself and for Himself.

Verse 3 says, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies." When she sees this, she realizes that although everything has changed, the covenant between her and the Lord has not changed. Now she can say, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." When her experience was shallower, she said at the height of her desire for fellowship, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16). She was filled with a sense of sweetness, and she could not help but proclaim that the Lord was hers. But this is different from what was spoken earlier. The feelings are not as strong; on the contrary, there are even some insubordinate feelings. Yet she still believes deeply that the Lord is in His own garden. Therefore, she can say, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." The previous basis for her speaking was her feeling, whereas the present basis is her faith. Her heart has spontaneously turned from herself to the Lord.

He still "feedeth among the lilies" (2:16). Just as He fed the flock before, He is feeding the flock now. In the past, He fed the flock among the lilies; now He is feeding the flock in the same place. She has learned to look to the ever unchanging Lord instead of her

fluctuating feelings. She does not follow these feelings at ordinary times, but even during times of her own failure, she no longer follows these feelings.

II. A LIFE WITHIN THE VEIL (6:4-13)

A. The Beloved's Praise (6:4-9)

After the maiden arrives at this stage, we see the Lord's satisfaction in her. This book speaks of a progressive union; the purpose of the union is fellowship, while the meaning of fellowship is identification. Hence, the maiden sees in the King what she has experienced in the King. The King sees the manifestation of His life in the maiden. The King's praise is a proclamation of the riches the believers have received through their union with the Lord.

Verse 4 says, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners." The Lord is viewing the believers from heaven, from within the sanctuary. Hence, this is something which happens within the veil. The Lord has mentioned her beauty and comeliness previously. But the beauty and comeliness in this verse are more restricted than before. Therefore, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem."

Tirzah is where the palace is (1 Kings 14:17). Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Tirzah signifies the heavenly sanctuary, the dwelling of God. Jerusalem signifies the heavenly Jerusalem. The Lord is examining our heavenly nature and life within the sanctuary. In that Jerusalem everything is comely, and in that Tirzah everything is beautiful, because both are God's new creation. Today believers are already displaying the beauty and comeliness of the coming sanctuary.

Weapons are the most important thing to an army in battle, whereas the banner is the most important thing in victory. If the battle is lost, the banner is put away in shame. An unfurled banner signifies the glory of victory. This verse indicates that the maiden is beautiful and comely before the Lord, as solid as the heavenly city and as serene as the sanctuary. At the same time, she displays the glory of her victory before the enemy and the world. A life within the veil is not just a life before the Lord, but a life before the enemy, because the heaven in which the saints dwell is the very heaven which the enemy assails. God has no intention for His believers to possess only the heavenly beauty without possessing a warring nature. The heavenly warfare is never abated before the Lord.

Believers ought to be lovable and terrible at the same time. Believers today have lost their loveliness before the Lord, and they have lost their terribleness before the enemy and the world. Are men terrified by us? The Bible often mentions the terribleness of the Lord; He is terrible because He is holy. If we maintain our holiness and victory, we will see the enemy retreating and the world standing back. But believers today have sacrificed their terribleness, and neither men nor demons are afraid of them any longer.

Verse 5a says, "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me." The first phrase in verse 5 is a poetic expression. The power of love is expressed by the affection in the eyes. The Lord is not rejecting the believers' love; rather, there is the element of encouragement and praise. Just as He turned down the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:25-29), delayed two days before going up to Judea (John 11:5-7), told Moses, "Let me alone" (Exo. 32:10), and allowed Jacob to hold on to Him (Gen. 32:26), He is inviting the maiden's expression of love with a word of seeming rejection. Turning away is the opposite of fixing one's eyes upon an object. This speaks not only of love, but of the firmness of love. It seems that He has become weak before her love; this weakness in Him has been displayed often in the face of love. He seems to give a hint of His total helplessness, apparent failure, and lack of defense before love. Only those who have experienced the Lord's apparent rejection, delay, denial, and helplessness know the way of the Lord.

Verses 5b to 7 say, "Thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead: thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks." Just as before, "hair" signifies the power of consecration, while "teeth" signify the power of reception. The temples or cheeks within the locks signify hidden beauty. The praise in these verses is the same as in 4:1-3. But here we see two important facts:

(1) The Lord's love never changes. Although the maiden failed through her delay and feels that she has sinned through falling into darkness, the Lord treats her just the same as before. In order to remove her doubt that He may have changed, He reveals Himself to her with the same words. What a believer most often lacks after a failure is the assuring faith; it is easy for him to develop a wrong evaluation of his relationship with the Lord. We often do not realize how full of doubts we are. Therefore, the Lord uses the same words; He does this to remove our doubts.

(2) Many spiritual experiences need to be repeated even after a believer has reached a higher stage of attainment. Just as it is necessary to have separating consecrations, the power of reception, and a hidden life at the time of immaturity, the same things are necessary at the time of maturity. Some spiritual experiences can change as you progress. But other spiritual experiences, such as those mentioned here, do not change as you progress. These experiences take on a deeper significance at a higher stage. Have we not experienced many repeated lessons in our own spiritual journey? Are not the lessons learned at the latter stage more perfect than those learned in the initial stage? The experiences may be the same, but the level and degree are different.

Verse 8 says, "There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number." All these people are related to Solomon. In the world, this may be evil, but spiritually, this presents a beautiful picture to those who understand spiritual types. Our Lord is gaining the whole church with all the believers. Corporately speaking, the Lamb has only one wife. But individually speaking, He has many lovers. Some are like queens, some are like concubines, while others are like virgins. Adam, Isaac, and Moses all typify Christ marrying a corporate wife. But Solomon typifies Christ taking individual believers. It seems that those who are holy and spiritual are not chosen as the type;

rather, an unrighteous one is chosen as a type of God. Yet the unrighteousness of the person is not typified. A thief can be a type of the Lord, but only the act of stealing is typified. All those who have wisdom should understand this.

The experiences of individual believers in their communication and relationship with the Lord's love are not the same. Some are like queens, others are like concubines, and still others are like virgins. But whatever they are, they all have a love relationship with the King. Yet none of them matches the maiden in her pursuit.

Verse 9 says, "My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." Here the Lord marks out the one from among all the people who satisfies His heart. The Lord considers her as the unique one. This does not mean that there is only one person of her kind. Rather, it means that in the Lord's eyes, she can be considered as the unique one. She is absolutely in the Holy Spirit; hence, she is a dove. She is also fully separated from the world. Therefore, she is indeed "undefiled." It seems as if she is the only perfect one begotten of grace, the only child of grace. It seems that among all the products of the work of grace, she is the most excellent one. Being a child of grace does not merely mean being one who experiences the forbearance of God and who is forgiven by Him. All of the works of God in man's heart are works of grace. Grace means that it is done by God and not by man. A person who receives more grace is one who allows God to work on him more, while a person who receives less grace is one who allows God to work on him less. God has the grace, but man will not necessarily allow God to do all the works in him. Everything that is of the self belongs to the law, and everything that is of God belongs to grace. The church is full of children of grace, yet only a very small number of people will allow grace to work on them to the point of perfection. Being the only child of grace does not mean that the maiden is the only one; it merely means that she is the most excellent one. (The meaning of the only child is that there is an absolute union with the Lord, and that everything is the Lord's. She has reached a complete union with the Lord.)

"The daughters saw her, and blessed her." Although many believers realize that they are not absolute for the Lord, they know the ones who are absolute for Him. They have enough life within them to admire those who are absolute, even though they do not yet have enough life to be absolute for the Lord themselves. Many people have enough experience of obedience to appreciate those who are absolutely obedient, even though they are not absolute in obedience. The daughters, queens, and concubines may not admire the maiden in the fleshly sense, but they cannot help but acknowledge the blessedness of the maiden with respect to the grace she has received. A life within the veil and everything within man that is from God should be held in high esteem.

B. The Maiden's Glory (6:10)

Verse 10 says, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" Here the Holy Spirit speaks through the mouth of a third party again and brings out the maiden's glory through exclamatory questions.

All four questions refer to the maiden. The Holy Spirit likes to stimulate the thoughts of the believers with questions; He arouses their attention once again to consider God's work and understand what is pleasing to God. Every time the Holy Spirit poses a question, it comes after a renewed perfecting on the part of the maiden. This was the case in chapter three. It is repeated again in chapter eight. Here we see the same pattern. Every time the believer reaches a higher level of experience, the Holy Spirit uses questions to reveal the history or reason behind the experience.

"Looketh forth as the morning." She has arrived at the morning again. The word "morning" is the same word as "day break" in 2:17 and 4:6. Her shadows have fled away; there is no further barrier between her and the Lord. She enters into a life without barrier. Although it is not yet high noon, it is nevertheless morning. Her future is as bright as the morning light, and her hope is as promising as the morning. She can look forward to everything, as morning looks forth toward the day. The future and the hope of the morning is high noon. She has already received the promise of high noon (Prov. 4:18). The way of a righteous man in the hand of the Lord goes only as far as high noon; there is nothing after high noon.

"Fair as the moon." The emphasis here is not on the waxing or waning of the moon, but on the beauty of it, which is the soft glow that emanates from it. She is heavenly, yet she shines on earth and reveals her testimony to those in darkness (Psa. 89:37).

"Clear as the sun." This means that there is no shadow; she is full of light. Both the sun and the moon signify her heavenliness. The moon signifies the grace within her, while the sun signifies what she is in the Lord. In herself, she is dead. Like the moon, she has no life and no vitality of her own, and the light and life come from the sun. When she faces the sun, there is light. When she turns her back to the sun, there is darkness. However, as far as her being in the Lord is concerned, she is clear as the sun. She is a totally new creation. There is only light; there is no darkness. Just as the Lord is the sun, she is also a sun.

"Terrible as an army with banners." Not only does she have a future that is full of hope, and a life that is absolutely heavenly, but she is a victor who constantly triumphs in her victory. She is "terrible as an army with banners." She goes from victory to victory. Do you know such a one? Have you seen her?

C. This Section Being an Unsettled Passage without a Conclusive Judgment (6:11-12)

Verses 11 and 12 say, "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." The last clause can be translated, "My soul set me upon the chariots of my willing people." If these two verses describe the maiden, the only problem is in the expression "my willing people." Other than this, the two verses seem to be an answer of the maiden; she considers whether there is any progress or advance in God's work. In the process of doing this, her heart is set upon the chariots of the King. (But the problem, as we

have said, lies in the expression "the chariots of my willing people," for only the King can sit in the chariots.)

D. The Maiden's Progress and Victory (6:13)

Verse 13 says, "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies." "Shulamite" means daughter of peace and is the feminine form of Solomon. The Holy Spirit speaks as a third person and pleads earnestly for her to return so that they can behold her. She has gone away on a chariot. She advances and overcomes, and there is no obstacle or limitation. Now others want to see her and know the kind of preparations she went through in order to arrive at her progress and victory. On the one hand, this request reflects the heart of all those who have similar pursuits, those who are eager to find out the reasons for her present advance. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit shows those coming after her the kind of preparation necessary for the work. He shows it through a request by a third party and an answer by another third party.

Here the Holy Spirit reveals His mind through two groups of third parties. He sends out the request through one group and provides the answer through another group. In this way, He provides the opportunity for others to know the process which the Shulamite passed through in order to prepare herself for the work. She is now indeed a Shulamite, because her union with Solomon has become insoluble. Moreover, she has made Solomon's work her own work.

The company of two armies can be translated the dance of two armies. This is the place where Jacob saw God's angel (Gen. 32:2). It must be a very exciting place, a place which attracts people. Dancing is a sign of victory (Exo. 15:20; 1 Sam. 18:6). Hence, the dance of two armies must mean victory. This question implies, "Why do you have to look at the Shulamite like looking at two heavenly armies celebrating a victory dance? What virtues does the Shulamite have that you consider her as two armies?"