



Love's Abiding Hope

His Wife Has Made Herself Ready

| Song 8:1-14

Introduction

The song is drawing to a close and thankfully it has a happy ending. Our culture has become so cynical and jaded. The critics would tell us not everyone lives happily ever after. But we know better: there is no reason people should not live happily ever after. It was the reason Christ came into the world.

Luke 19:10

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

John 10:10

...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

The genius of the Gospel lies in the fact it tells us we can have a happy eternity once we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

The Shulamite's Wishes **8:1-4**

The previous chapter closed with the Shulamite declaring what she wanted out of life. In the first verses of chapter eight, she allowed her imagination to soar to new heights. Trapped as she was, the young girl dared to let her heart describe its perfect setting...if all was right in the world. She wished for the period of waiting to be over so she could give full expression of her love for her beloved without being condemned or criticized.

To Show Her Love Publicly verse 1 We must again be reminded about the Oriental setting that serves as the background of our story. Strict social conventions kept a bride and prospective groom apart. It would have been highly improper for her, under the rigid social code of the day, to have expressed her love for him publicly and openly. The Shulamite wished she could be more open in expressing all her heart felt for her beloved. She desired that life's social conventions did not stand between them: for society not to stare, condemn, or despise if she were to demonstrate all her heart.

Do we not often wish for the same thing? At times our social customs and conventions can be very strong. For instance, it is humorous and entertaining to go to a football game and yell, shout, and cheer...to wave our arms and paint our bodies with the colors and logos of our favorite teams.

On the other hand, try to get excited about the things of God. Go next door and share the Good News with your neighbor. Witness to a colleague at work or at school. The moment a person expresses any religious emotion, he is labeled as a fanatic. He has offended social custom by 'ramming his religion down the throats' of others. Most of us wish we had courage to be so strong. **Matthew 10:33**

To Share Her Love Privately verse 2 In other words, she desired to be married. According to the social laws of the day, for her to take a man home, even to her mother's house, would have been an unthinkable liberty. For her to take him home and give him spiced wine and inflame his passions would have been unlawful. How she desired to give full display to her love without being disgraced. She longed for the marriage day to arrive so society would no longer intrude between her and him.

To Show Her Love Passionately verses 3-4 What she wanted was right and proper, even in an Eastern culture...within the bounds of marriage. She did not want to do anything unseemly or improper. She was looking beyond the present to the future, when all restraints would be forever and properly removed.

This is the height of love for Christ: the height to which we should all aspire. Have we ever felt like the Shulamite? Has our longing for the Lord at times simply welled up in almost inexpressible longing and desire? Have we ever felt like trampling on every social restraint and shouting out loud: 'My Jesus, I love you.' Has the longing for the consummation of things in eternity at times become overwhelming? Do we love our Lord like the Shulamite loved her shepherd?

The Shulamite's Wedded Bliss **8:5-14**

Like any good story with a happy ending, we see the culmination just as it was intended to be. The young girl, in love with a lowly shepherd, managed to:

withstand the tempter
witness to the doubters
win over her family
wed her beloved

Everything tied up in a nice, neat package. This closing section of the *Song of Solomon* deals with the time of triumph for which all have been waiting.

The Shulamite And Her Beloved verses 5-7 No details are given about how or when, but we are assured the shepherd kept his promise and rescued his young fiancé. They were together and she was leaning on the arm of her beloved. And we must pause to wonder: who is asking this question in **verse 5**?

Could it be the shepherd had a companion, someone who understood the circumstances and was willing to stand with his friend should the need arise?

cf **John 3:28-30**

Nevertheless, the Shulamite was free. We are never told how the shepherd managed to do it...to set her free from the pavilion of the king, surrounded by guards and the watchful eye of the Daughters of Jerusalem. All we know is one moment she was in the king's pavilion and the next moment she was gone! The shepherd had come, the shackles were broken, and they were together at last.

This is how it is to be with the saved of all the ages. As the Bride of Christ, we are to be ever-watching and waiting. He promised to come again (John 14:3) and so we are to be anticipating His arrival at any moment. We don't know when and we are unclear as to how it will be executed, but He promised...and so, we wait. With our eyes on the eastern sky, and our ears tuned for the trump of God we live in anticipation of that moment.

We are given precious little information on the pages of scripture concerning the rapture of believers. Enough to let us know it will happen, but not enough to explain it. The church will be taken out of the earth in an instant and the history of the world will again be forever altered. The restraining power of the Holy Spirit will be removed, but those who are saved will find themselves at the throne of God (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Naturally, the bride and groom would have much to talk about after their long separation (verses 5b-7). They spoke little about their time apart. The past was just that...the past. They were far more interested in each other and what the years ahead would mean for them.

They did remember something important, however: how they met. It would seem it was somewhere in the vineyards, under an apple tree. Poetically speaking, for the shepherd it was as though the Shulamite had been born for that moment...at that moment in time. He recalled the instant he laid eyes on her and knew he would spend the rest of his life with her.

As Christians, we should also reflect on our salvation testimony. Do you remember the place? the time? the circumstances leading you to the Lord?

Tracing the transformation from wretched sinner to white-washed saint allows us to see the hand of God at work in conforming us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:28-30). Praise God, we aren't home yet, nor are we the people that we used to be. We are sinners saved by grace.

Then, the couple relished a thought: they were to be together forever, unhindered by the constraints of others who might wish otherwise. In his heart, she was forever to be sealed as his bride. Outwardly though, a sign of some sort would indicate to others that she was spoken for; she was forever his.

NOTE: In this instance, perhaps there was some item to serve as the token. In Bible days, the signet ring actually stood for the person who wore it. These seals were used to make contracts binding and to serve as a symbol of ownership (1 Kings 21:8, Esther 3:12).

In modern times, handed down from medieval practices, brides and grooms exchange wedding rings as a symbol of love. While the ring serves as a reminder of the pledge taken by the one wearing it, it also puts others on notice that the person is spoken for and unavailable to outsiders.

As Christians, we were engaged to our Great Shepherd in the moment we first believed. As a promise of our life together, Christ gave us an evident token, a seal of our engagement. The Apostle Paul called the Holy Spirit our 'earnest' (see 2 Corinthians 1:21-22)...the down payment and seal of the promise of eternal life (Ephesians 4:30). We are now pledged to watch and wait and work for Him until the moment He arrives to take us home.

Likewise, it is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27); but love is strong as death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God...not even death (Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

verses 6b-7 For only a moment, there was a realization: another had intruded in their relationship. What about the king? He had been scorned and humiliated by the rejection of the Shulamite. Would he be vindictive and harsh? Could he pursue the couple and hinder their life together? Certainly, Solomon was hurt and searched fruitlessly for true love (Ecclesiastes 7:25- 28), but he could never undo love's power.

Consider the spiritual comparison. Once the church is taken away in the Rapture, satan will no longer have access to the Bride of Christ. With his efforts to spoil her thwarted, he will vent his rage elsewhere. As believers are gathered to Christ in the air, satan will be cast down and confined to the earth for the duration of the seven-year Tribulation Period (Revelation 12:12). Being confined, he will pour out his vindictiveness on Israel particularly and on mankind in general.

For all the jealousy and ugliness left behind, the Shulamite and the shepherd did not dwell long discussing the issue. Rather, they talked of love (verse 7). If the couple could survive the separation inflicted by Solomon, then nothing could ever undo their love for one another (*cf* Romans 8:38-39). They had come through a difficult test and their hearts were still united together. Others might laugh them to scorn (contemn), but those strangers could never understand the couple's struggle.

NOTE: In Luke 4:6-7, satan approached Christ in the wilderness. Jesus had recently been baptized and was beginning His public ministry. The devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, if only the Lord would worship him...in essence, to forsake the great object of His love. Of course, the offer was instantly and utterly rejected. Thus, many waters cannot quench love.

The Shulamite And Her Brothers 8:8-12 The young couple were united again. The tempter had been removed. Even the women of Solomon's harem seemed to be silenced once and for all. We were never introduced to the relatives of the shepherd; but what about the family of the Shulamite? Early on, they had been against the relationship their sister chose to have with a lowly sheep herder. Had they changed their minds at this point? Because they are family, we need to pause and take a long, hard look at the brothers.

EXCURSION: THE BROTHERS

While largely remaining in the background of the story, the Shulamite's brothers were introduced three times in the *Song of Solomon*...in **1:6**, again in **2:15**, and for the last time in **8:8**.

The first time we meet the brothers, we are told how they **repressed the Shulamite** (1:6). They were harsh and angry with their sister and did all they could to hinder her love for the shepherd. To keep the love birds apart, the brothers made her the keeper of the vineyard. In explaining to the Daughters of Jerusalem why she was so sunburned, the Shulamite said, 'My mother's children...made me the keeper...'

NOTE: once more, be reminded...in the typology of the story, the Shulamite represents the Church; the shepherd represents Christ; the king represents the prince of this world, satan. The brothers of the Shulamite, therefore, represent Israel.

In this particular verse, there are two interesting things to take note of concerning the Shulamite's relationship with her brothers:

1. She identifies her siblings as *my mother's children*. She did not actually call them her brothers, but instead used an expression to suggest estrangement and distance. In the same manner, Israel and the church are near kin: both were brought into the world by the same God. They have much in common...speaking the same language of faith, revering the same heroes of the past, and a common body of faith. But where there is kinship, there is also distance. **Israel is not the church and the church is not Israel.** The parting of ways, just as with the Shulamite, is over the issue of the Shepherd. The church loves Him...Israel finds Him too lowly and common to be taken seriously.

2. The task to which the Shulamite was assigned by her brothers is telling, as well. She was made the keeper of the vineyard. The Bible uses three trees to symbolize Israel: the *fig tree*, the *olive tree*, and the *vine*. The vine represents Israel throughout the Old Testament. As a vine, the nation was uprooted from Egypt, carried across the wilderness and planted in the Promised Land (Psalm 80:8). As a vine, she brought forth sour grapes (Hosea 10:13) and her keepers, the elders and national leaders, mistreated the prophets whom God sent to warn them of their sins (Acts 7:52).

Of course, Jesus had all this in view when He announced the vineyard would be taken away from Israel and given to another (Mark 12:1-9). Likewise, He considered Himself to be the True Vine (John 15:1-8). Therefore, when the young girl was made to be the keeper of the vineyard, we have illustrated for us Israel's miserable failure. The Shulamite was not tending her own vineyard, but another's, just as the responsibilities of Israel, due to her own failure, have been given to the church. In both instances, the result was the same: anger.

The second time we meet her brothers, we are told how they **ridiculed the Shulamite** (2:15). Foxes are known for their cunning and craftiness (*to be sly as a fox*). The brothers, like those foxes, had maneuvered in such a way as to believe their sister could never be with the one she truly loved. The brothers disapproved of the affair and did everything in their power to spoil it and hinder it from moving forward.

It is significant to our typology that Jesus nicknamed only one of His foes. Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, was labeled as a fox (Luke 13:32). This Herod killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus. Later, Herod Agrippa mocked the church and put James to death.

God smote him dead for his blasphemy and sent worms to gnaw away at his living flesh (Acts 12:20-23). Apparently, the relationship of the Bride and her Bridegroom is not to be trifled with!

On this third occasion when we meet her brothers, we see how they **respected the Shulamite** (8:8). The long days of separation were over. The Shulamite had proven herself, not just to the Shepherd, but also to her brothers, it would seem. They gave in, having been won over at last.

Of course, there is coming a day when Israel will be reconciled with God. When the nation sees the Shepherd coming with His Bride, they will look on Him whom they persecuted and will be saved (Zechariah 12:10). Israel will see how wrong she has been and how right the church was in its love for Christ.

Back to the text, the scene opened with the brothers speaking to each other about their 'little sister,' which is true to type because the church is historically younger than Israel.

To begin with, we see the brother's perception of their sister. To them, she is immature. They could not adjust to the idea she had grown up and was no longer their little sister. Her experience in Solomon's court had been enough to mature any young woman. Yet, the big brothers could not see she had grown into a wise and exceptionally attractive woman, ready for marriage.

The modern world looks at the church and believes the need for religion and all its ritual has passed. There might have been a time when the church served a purpose, it reasons, but what can a church do about international terrorism? economic crisis? poverty and disease?

The world believes man must pull himself up by his own bootstraps and make his environment a better place. The church certainly has no ability to compete with such a cultural mandate.

verse 9 Upon the return of their sister from the king's pavilion, the brothers reason one of two possibilities has occurred: either she was strong, like a **wall**, and withstood the king's advances; or she had given in to the king, like a **door**, and succumbed to his overpowering will.

If the Shulamite had been strong during this time, then her brothers would extol her and crown her with praises. They had misjudged and maligned her in the past; if she had come through this trial with flying colors, they would be the first to grant her the familial place that was rightfully hers.

On the other hand, if she had allowed the king to have his way with her and she now stood in their presence as one spoiled, they would do everything they could to hide her away and sweep away the family shame. Never again would she be free to choose her own path. She would be put away not only for her own protection, but also because of her own lack of character and courage.

In essence, this entire scene was a kind of judgment seat before which their little sister was summoned and tried. Is there not a similar judgment awaiting the church? There is to be a time of investigation and testing when the deeds done in the body will be examined and explained...the church will have to appear and give answer. For the redeemed there is to be no prison. Only a palace is in store for the Bride of Christ.

Romans 14:10-12

2 Corinthians 5:10

In **verses 10-12**, the Shulamite confidently answered the charges made by her brothers. Like a sturdy wall, she had withstood the offers of the king. She was no longer their 'little' sister. Rather, the events of her recent past had matured her and she saw with new eyes the realities and harshness of life. Whether the brothers respected her or not, she had found favor in the eyes of the one she longed to please...her shepherd, her beloved.

Let us not forget: The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a judgment seat. Our lives will be brought into review, and our works tested by fire. The wood, hay and stubble of life will be consumed by fire. Yet the same fire will reveal the gold, silver, and precious stones of a life spent living for Christ. Calvary has taken care of the rest. Our failings and sins will be found covered by Calvary's blood. The memory of such things will then vanish like the wind

Ephesians 1:6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

As a last word of triumph, the Shulamite reminded her family and all who might be listening of an important fact. Solomon had many vineyards, none of which he had ever dirtied his hands to tend. He allowed others to do the work and he claimed the increase. By contrast, the Shulamite could show the work of her own hands. In the end, she would no longer tend a vineyard, but would be the wife of the shepherd. At any rate, she had proof of her strength of character and her work ethic.

The name *Baal-hamon* literally means 'lord of the multitude' and in it we understand the masses will always settle for less. They might be willing to work hard for another's gain, but not the Shulamite. She had things in their right perspective.

NOTE: The number two-hundred is significant. In the Bible, it carries the idea of *insufficiency* (John 6:7; Joshua 7:21; 2 Samuel 14:26). In the same manner, what the prince of this world has to offer is never sufficient; it never satisfies the soul.

The Shulamite And Her Betrothed verses 13-14 In the closing verses only the Shulamite and the shepherd appear. Others have walked across the stage, but the principal characters are who we see at the last.

His Last Request verse 13 The story ends, appropriately, in a garden. Paradise had been regained. The Hebrew word translated as *dwell* literally means 'to abide permanently.' She had come into his garden, no longer in peril from the world or its prince. This was what he had been planning for all the time. In effect, what the shepherd said to her was, *Others have heard your voice, now let me hear it.* And what was it he longed to hear to hear? No proclamation of her strength; no complaining about the past. All he wanted to hear from her was 'I love you.'

Her Last Reply verse 14 She no longer spoke of the mountains of separation (2:17); those days were long passed. No, these were the mountains of spices...the scented slopes. With her beloved, she longed to live forever in a world where nothing came between them; where the air was filled with the wonderful aroma of their love.

One day in the not-too-distant-future, we will be together with our Lord and Savior. For all eternity, we will enlarge upon the theme of our love for Him: worthy is the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:12-14). The throne of Heaven will resound with the praises of the redeemed and echo with the shouts of the heavenly host. The paradise of God's garden waits to be filled with the citizens of Heaven. And what is our reply? Even so, come, Lord Jesus!