

# The lily among thorns

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us turn for a few moments to the Song of Solomon and the second chapter. The Song of Solomon, the second chapter.

And the second verse. Song of Solomon, chapter 2 and verse 2. We might read the first verse, although it is the second verse that I want to speak particularly on.

I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

As the lily among thorns. It is perhaps not surprising in this materialistic age that people criticize and disparage this great book.

I have heard some people say that they wondered how it found its way into the sacred canon of scripture at all.

[ 1 : 25 ] But nobody with a definite Christian experience would say that. The trouble for many people is that it shows, it reflects such a high degree of spirituality that it is so far beyond the average religious person today.

But to the people of God it is a very precious book. The real substance and the very heart of Christianity is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers.

And you and I who have that experience sometimes have feelings and emotions that we can't find words to express of our own.

But we find such words and such phrases in the Song of Solomon. If there was no other purpose for the inclusion of the Song of Solomon, and certainly there is another purpose, then that in the sacred canon, it's there.

Just as the Psalms are there to express another aspect of our Christian experience. We have this, of course, under the similitude of a bride and bridegroom.

[ 3 : 03 ] Sometimes the bride is speaking. Sometimes the bridegroom is speaking. Sometimes the bridegroom is speaking about himself.

Other times he is speaking about his bride, the church, the body of Christ. He is speaking about himself when he says, in the first verse, I am the rose of Sheeran, and the lily of the valleys.

He is speaking about his church when he says, as the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters.

As the lily among thorns. Now, there are two things that the Savior is speaking about there.

He is speaking of the nature of the Christian life. He says it's like a lily. And that figure is used in other parts of Scripture.

[ 4 : 14 ] Speaking of the nature of the true Christian life. And then he is speaking of the environment in which that Christian life is lived out in this world.

It's among the thorns. And these are the two aspects of the words that I want to speak on for a few moments. The nature of the Christian life as the lily.

And as I said, we find it the figure used in some other parts of Scripture. I will be as the Jew unto Israel.

He shall grow as the lily and spread out his roots like lebel. And so on. And the Savior makes reference to it.

And it speaks of the purity, the inevitable growth and the witness of the Christian life.

[ 5 : 25 ] It describes that new life that God implants in the soul when the Holy Spirit awakens us and transforms us and comes to dwell in us.

and we have quite a detailed description of that in the chapter that we have read. He is speaking of his people and several aspects of his people in that great high priestly prayer in the 17th chapter of John.

And as I say, it describes the new life implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit that struggles amid all the corruptions and the defects of our old nature more and more dominating the old nature and getting the advantage of the old nature and eventually becoming the true self.

as Paul says, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature a new creation. All things have passed away behold all things have become new and this new nature rise into such a pitch of spirituality that eventually it becomes like the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And the close affinity between that new nature and the nature of God in Christ he describes here when he speaks of himself as the lily of the valley and he speaks of his church as the lily also at the present time among thoughts destined to become like Christ himself.

[ 7 : 37 ] And that is what John says Brethren, now are we the sons of God and it does not appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is like Christ.

It's a it's a tremendous future that we look forward to though we feel the corruptions of our own nature and we'll feel it until we reach the grave and feel it more keenly.

I'm sure you feel as I often feel myself that I am more perturbed by the follies and the sins that I committed 60, 70 years ago than I was when I was first brought to the Lord.

Sometimes I used to feel dear me I'm not getting better I'm getting worse I feel the keenness of sin but then when I began to think of it I said well no after all that's growth and grace that I feel sin more keenly today than I felt in the last 50 years.

the nearer we come to the light the more we see our own corruptions and the more we see the contrast between what we are just now and what we are destined to become in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 10 ] it almost it almost feels like presumption to speak like that of us as poor healthy servants in sin and we feel what we are like today with all our imperfections our weaknesses our corruptions to think of a day when we'll be as free from sin as God Almighty himself is now I'm not going further than the scripture leads me it's quite true we shall be like him and there's no sin in him and to think of a day when when we'll be so free from sin as the Almighty Lord is himself we shall be like him now it's not only that this is a wonderful description of the

Christian life it's a challenge it's a challenge to us a searching and a challenge to us am I really getting like the Lord Jesus does my life my aspirations my devotions my ideas point in the direction of absolute perfection so that this word is it's not only that it's wonderful in its description but it's challenging and searching as the lily among thoughts now when I think of the description there are three particular factors that I think this similitude of the lily describes and it is the distinctiveness of Christian character being a Christian is far more than being a member of a church far more than being a member of an evangelical church it is living a life along a definite plan a definite line directed by the infallible word of God born of God a new life altogether new life it's not a step higher than somebody else it's not that we are better than the people of the world it's the fact that we don't belong to the people of the world at all once we were part of this ordinary generation but in Christ no I'm not going too far because I'm substantiating everything I say by the scripture we don't belong to the world at all we're no longer in the line of the world so that it's not the fact that we are better than the world but we're a different race of people altogether I remember reading a very nice and challenging book in my student days called the aristocracy of grace and it followed the line of the ordinary blue-blooded aristocracy and drawing a parallel between it and Christian people that we are really spiritual aristocrats we don't belong to the common people that talk now that's true perfectly true and that's what the saviour says did you notice that he repeats it they are not of the world they don't belong to the world they don't belong to the people of the world they are not of the world even as

I am not of the world so there is the distinctiveness of Christian character and that is what we have to live and there another thought is this the loftiness of the Christian ideal and what is our ideal perfection that's the ideal oh the devil very often says you going to be perfect think you're perfect poor sinner like you I know all about your sins and so on so the devil says now you're aiming to lower your standard and you might get there but perfection sinless perfection no you'll never get there and so the world often scoffs at us when and if we say to them one day we're going to be perfect that's our goal sinless perfection that's the loftiness of the

[ 14 : 45 ] Christian ideal and the other thought is this not only the distinctiveness of the of Christian character and the loftiness of the Christian ideal but the uniqueness of Christian experience you

know there's a religious experience and a Christian experience remember during our student days and if there are any students here taking moral philosophy you know you may have one of your textbooks the varieties of religious experiences by William James and he deals with religious experiences of various people and I think we could add chapters to William James with all the fancy religions that we have today and they you see many people when there's a spiritual revival many people come in following as people see on the bandwagon of that coming in on the wave of religious emotion who are never converted at all and who may follow on with a religious experience and that religious experience is described in one of the chapters of the

Hebrews when it speaks and is a very searching passage those who have been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have fallen away but it does not describe the true Christian experience and the difference between the very best and the very highest religious experience and the uniqueness of Christian experience is this the presence of Christ the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart the presence of Christ oh the thrill of Christ's presence of the consciousness of Christ's presence and the experience that we have when the Lord manifests himself and gives us a richness of the consciousness of his presence and as I said before we can't express it in words if we go to the Song of

Solomon and we find words there we find it there that expresses the presence of Christ communion with Christ is the very essence of the Christian life and that is what shows the uniqueness of Christian experience as distinct from religious experience we might spend a whole evening of course the question meeting as carried on in the highlands I don't know whether you still have it down here usually describes the difference between religious experience and Christian experience so the lily is distinctive from all the other flowers oh the beauty of the lily our destiny our present state in

Christ we're far from perfect today and in another sense we are perfect in the sight of God as he looks to us and sees us through Christ we're perfect already I think I quoted that yesterday he sees no iniquity in his Jacob nor perversness in his Israel there's no time with God and so we're perfect already we're redeemed we're holy redeemed already in the purpose of God and that's how he sees us as we will finally be but of course this brings us back to where we are and that is the environment in which we have to live out this wonderful life as the lily among thoughts and he is describing here the antagonism of a world of sin of wickedness and also the antagonism of the old nature that we still have to fight against the antagonism of the world against that nature do you remember when the

Lord was born into this world do you remember the massacre of the children at that time and when Joseph and Mary were born to go down into Egypt for Herod will seek the young child to destroy well we have there a historic parallel of what goes on when the new nature when the child when the spiritual child is born within us the new man that is going to fight against the old man until he finally becomes the true self and have the complete domination in the world you shall have tribulation they are not of the world I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil now

[ 21 : 16 ] God could take us straight home to glory as he took the dying thief but you know the dying thief lost quite a lot that you and I may have who have gone through this wilderness we carry to heaven an experience of going through the wilderness leaning upon our beloved and that the dying thief couldn't get and won't get even in heaven so as God chose that the children of Israel should not go directly into the land of Canaan but go around about way taking them 40 years so he leaves us here and so the Savior said don't take them out of the world but keep them in the world keep them from the evil that is in the world and my it is an organized evil it was organized against the

Savior himself and it's one of the greatest organizations in human experience the devil and his emissaries it's a mighty organization powerful deceitful devilish and that's why he's called the God of this world that's what the scripture speaks of him the God of this world not that he is a God in the sense of the almighty no no not in that sense but he is because he commands so much he commands so much of the wealth of the activities of this world of the resources of this world the God of this world that blinds the eyes of them and believe not and when Christ sent out the seventy he said behold

I send you forth as lambs among wolves that's just the same truth as we find here as the lily among thorns and you know there's a subtle religious opposition of the devil the devil in the church the

devil outside the church but the devil inside the church can do more harm and more there's more subtlety when he gets within the church and that's what the scripture means when it says that he transforms himself into the likeness of an angel of light it makes me very angry when I hear I never I don't listen to a service from the world council of churches I wouldn't waste my time with that but occasionally I've heard them reading this glorious chapter the 17th chapter of

John that they may be one even as we are there's no movement of the devil in the recent history of the church that's so subtle and so damnable now that's a word that's in the scripture I'm not pointing a word of my own out of the scripture as this world council of churches many good Christians are deceived by it and it's becoming a power and who knows in the next few decades if the Lord doesn't come who knows what will happen about this world council of churches in studying the history in studying the factors in the second coming of Christ we notice that the antichrist is going to come out of our religious organisation and you know that's the organisation as far as

I can calculate out of which the antichrist is coming the world council of churches not Romanism itself but Romanism and modernism and all the isms that are represented by the world council of churches that's one of the subtleties it's not the only subtlety but it's one of the subtleties that constitutes the thorns in which this lily grows to maturity let me mention another factor in this environment and that is one of the greatest dangers to young people today is the fact of so many backslidden Christians in the church people who have gone back now I distinguish between those who have never really come to a saving knowledge of

[ 26 : 36 ] Christ and gone back to the world and those who have really been converted but who have slipped back and lowered the standard and become as the scripture says entangled with the yoke of bondage there is a pathetic narrative recorded in the book of kings where the lord sent a young prophet to cry against the altar in Samaria the idolatries that were practiced in the altar of Samaria and the lord said now don't associate with them don't go and have tea with them in other words drink no meat eat no meat and drink no water with them but just get right out and he did so but there was an old prophet you'll possibly remember the narrative there was an old prophet in Samaria an old backslidden rascal of a fellow that's the only way I can describe him and his sons told him about this young prophet and he said get my arson

I want to go after him and he went after him and he said come home he said and eat bread with me and the young prophet said no the lord told me not to ah but he said the lord spoke to me and told me to take you back but he told a lie and the young prophet went back and we know what happened to him now when the lord gives a directive to his people he never changes his mind the young prophet should have known that he never changes his mind and says no no I want you to do something else no he never does that but you see there are back slitting people I meet some Christians people and oh how critical they are of our young converts and we have young converts in the church today that are not like anything that I have known in these 50 odd years that I have known

Christian service bright eager loyal to the church enthusiastic and some of the old backslidden ones say these young people you can't trust them but just test them and all that and they try to pick foot with them and discourage them in every way no that's one of the thorns that the lily has to contend with it has always been the case now we have been dealing with the factors from the outside what about the factors from the inside Paul warns us against an evil heart of unbelief and departing from the living God we are at the times in the enthusiasm and the elevation of a of a great sense of the Lord's presence to forget that there's an old man that there's an enemy within our heart still that we have to be very vigilant about and he's always ready to gain the ascendancy and the devil is always ready to take advantage of that and sometimes we find ourselves thrown into despondency by neglecting by failing to remember that there is an enemy in our own house a man's enemies the scripture says are those of his own house and the temptation severe temptations come from there and sometimes the very nature of the temptations constitute a temptation in themselves of us but I don't want to continue too long now the purpose of the enemy is to discourage us in every way to bring down our standard to say now no you're one of the holy people who think you're better than other people the world and the devil is always at that but let us remember this that

Christ said we don't belong to the world it's not that we're better than the world but we're a different class of people all together we're born of God regenerated by the grace of God with Christ's people Christ's witnesses and God has ordained that we should live out our lives in this evil environment and he has his purpose in it it is developing something in us a glory that we will take to heaven with

us we have often heard the phrase no cross no crown but we can live out it has been established down through the ages that we can live a Christian life in the most wicked and ungodly environment think of Enoch think of

[ 32 : 08 ] Noah and so on and we don't need to go back we can go forward as some of you know as some of you know my early Christian work was in the slums of this city and I can think of great trophies of grace that came out of some terrible environment I think of two young ladies I think of a home in a cannon gate don't think I should call it a home but a house where two drunken families shared the one room not a house but the one room such were the conditions in the cannon gate 50 60 years ago and more two drunken families and out of these two drunken families in the one room came two lovely

Christian girls I've known them I still know them one of them is very well married to a fine Christian pastor and the other is still in this city attending the mission that she attended in those days one girl told me that she was converted by the witness of the other person in a terrible environment that she lived a circumspect holy life and gave a great witness the lily among thorns well we have we have many examples of that down the ages and we have them today but thank god that even in the worst environment with all the filthy language that we hear around us today that a person can bear witness and live a holy life undefiled unspotted from the world now that is what you and I are destined to do and we are destined to be brought to perfection by living unspotted from the world and there is no need of us to fear any so kind of environment unto which our work and our witness may be or the fine Christian men and women who find themselves among our wicked foul-turned lot nevertheless God says the lily among thoughts so is my love among the daughters let us pray we thank thee oh lord that thou hast called us to a knowledge of thyself and that thou hast called us to live above the world independent of the world we should never have been able to live this except by thy grace but thou hast assured us that thy grace is sufficient and thy strength is made perfect in weakness and we thank thee for the many verifications we have of this truth down through the past stages and in the present and we believe in the future lord enable us to live unto thee and not to the world and so strengthen us by the destiny that thou dost put before us by the ideals that thou hast taught us and by the grace and the strength that thou dost promise us to hold and to live by these ideals we ask it for thy name sake amen hawk and see you anne me