

SONG OF SOLOMON 3:6–11

Christ the King, October 22, 2020

Smith

⁶ **Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?**
⁷ **Look! It is Solomon's carriage, escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel,**
⁸ **all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle,
each with his sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night.**
⁹ **King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon.**
¹⁰ **Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold.
Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior inlaid with love.
Daughters of Jerusalem, ¹¹ come out, and look, you daughters of Zion.
Look on King Solomon wearing a crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.**

There are four main directions we might take or ways to understand the Song of Solomon. Like the Gospels and the Books of Moses, the Song of Solomon is the Word of God. But unlike the Gospels and the Books of Moses, it doesn't seem to be an historical event. It's a poem, or a series of inter-related poems, all about marriage.

To understand the Song, we must ask: It is mostly about man and woman, or about God and man? Is it about real events, or is it more like a story or parable for teaching? Well, it doesn't relate to any event we know about in the life of King Solomon, who is a character in the poem, and so we take it to have been written as a story, something similar to a parable, to teach us. There are some things in the poem that must be about God and man, and many, many things that apply to the love of a husband and wife. So we take it in both ways: A story or poem to teach us about marriage and about our relationship with God. So when we apply the Song, we can see these two things: As with God and man, so also with marriage. And as with marriage, so also with God and man.

Now in our passage, it's the wedding day, and there are five little scenes:

1. First, something comes up from the desert or wilderness like a column of smoke.
2. Second, Solomon's carriage arrives with armed guards.
3. Third, an interlude when we, according to human nature and curiosity, peek inside Solomon's vehicle.
4. Fourth, the virgins or bridesmaids are invited to come and see the king and his crown
5. Fifth, we remember the day of the King's coronation. And that's what we apply most of all today as we glorify Christ the King.

Let's visit these scenes. First, something arrives from the desert, **“like a column of smoke...perfumed.”** The word “this” in verse 6 is feminine in Hebrew, and we take this to be the bride arriving at her wedding. God has drawn us to himself with the alluring invitation of the gospel, and we have been overwhelmed by his love. He has offered us paradise, and we, his church, have said “Yes!” And now the scene depicts the arrival of the Bride of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, in the moment we arrive in heaven, coming out of the wilderness of the fallen sinful world into God's paradise. In the scene, it's as if time has stopped—just like the moment when a groom sees the bride at their wedding, and he only has eyes for his beloved.

In the second scene, **King Solomon's carriage** arrives. Now, I don't know whether Solomon is meant to be the groom, or something like the rich uncle who is lending his limousine to the couple. Now, identifying Solomon by name in verse 7 is not going to affect the way we understand the rest of the passage, whether he is the groom, and therefore standing for Christ, or the one who gets us to the wedding, and therefore more like the Holy Spirit because of his many gifts.

But there are gifts, or extra things, to notice. The sixty warriors are there to give protection and security to the wedding, but they are also there to glorify the ceremony, to give honor to God. King David had a group of thirty warriors known as the Mighty Men, and here we find sixty warriors, twice as many as earthly Israel's greatest king.

If we are going to look for symbolism in their swords, and I'm not sure we need to, we might see what Paul calls the Sword of the Spirit in Ephesians, or the double-edged sword of the Word of God in Hebrews. And if we see the warriors as angels who defend us against the terrors of darkness or the terrors of the night, then we are still left with the idea that the swords stand for the word of God, since the power of God is in his word.

The third scene is an interlude. In our terms, we get to look inside the cool car that Solomon is lending to the couple: **the wood, the posts, the seat, the interior upholstery**. In terms of the marriage of God and the Church, Christ our King made this vehicle which transports us to the wedding feast. This transportation is the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Means of Grace are royal, from God himself. They are more precious than gold, able to be used in an everyday manner but with respect like the good silver, and lasting and solid like the best wood from the forests of Lebanon. The interior of it all? It is upholstered with 'love,' which might not be what we would expect, but it's certainly the truth. We are saved by the love of God, the love we don't deserve, which is God's grace.

The fourth scene leads into the last one, but before we get to the King we hear the invitation: **"Come out, and look, you daughters of Zion."** These are what we might call the bridesmaids. Nobody is turned away from the wedding banquet if they have trusted in Jesus. This was nothing like other ancient religions where women and children had practically no role at all except as slaves. Now, here is a place where each of us believers is in the Song in two roles at the same time. We are all a part of the Bride of Christ, but we are also the wise virgins who had oil in our lamps, the oil of faith. This reminds us that we are drawn by God the Holy Spirit with the promises and the vow of God, and we are also given faith, the oil of the gospel that keeps the lamp of faith burning our whole lives through.

So this fourth little scene becomes a flashback to the fifth and final scene, where we get to see the King crowned by his mother on his wedding day. Now, when was Christ crowned? When is a groom crowned on his wedding day? Here the images of the Song spill over into each other. Grooms were "king for a day" in an ancient Hebrew wedding, either wearing a little crown or a wreath of flowers in his hair, and he was treated like royalty by the guests. We still have an echo of this if we celebrate a wedding with a meal, and the couple sits at the center of the head table.

But let's get to our heavenly Bridegroom, Christ our King. We see Christ our King approach in his coronation parade, Palm Sunday, with people cheering and waving palm branches and throwing their coats on the donkey and on the ground below his feet. We hear the crowd shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

We see Christ our King crowned and decked in purple as the Roman soldiers mocked him, beat him, spat at him, and shoved a twisted crown of thorns onto his head. They nailed him to a cross and lifted that horrible throne into the air for all to see, the punishment he endured that brought us peace.

At the beginning of our passage, we all turned to look out to the desert at the bride coming, perfumed and like a column of smoke, clear and certain. I said it was like the moment frozen in every husband's mind, the moment when he sees his bride as his bride, the moment they are about to take and keep their vows.

This is the cross. This is the vow we broke, kept in our place by our God in person, in the flesh. Once when I was in college in Watertown, a prep-student (a high schooler) ahead of me in the library checkout owed a fine for a stack of books that was a couple of dollars. He couldn't pay it, and he didn't know what to do. I stepped in and paid it for him, and I told him not to pay me back, but that he remember it when he was preaching someday, that someone paid our debt in our place. The difference, though, is that what I did, didn't hurt me in the least.

What Jesus did, hurt him terribly. Every single one of our sins caused him pain when he was tempted, when he prayed for us in the Garden, when he was tortured by the soldiers, when he suffered on the cross, and finally gave up his life for ours in his humiliating death. Each sin of omission, each sin of commission, even the permanent and lifelong corruption of our original sin carried from generation through sinful generation—all of that burden from all of mankind was driven into his skull with that crown of thorns, with those nails on the cross, with those insults from his countrymen, the Children of Israel. His pain was on account of our sins. My sins.

Our King suffered, was tempted, struggled with the work and the punishment ahead of him. When he was tempted in the wilderness, it was a struggle. He turned to the Word of God for help. And when it was done, angels came to serve him. If he hadn't really been tempted, he would never have needed their comfort and help.

And in the Garden of Gethsemane "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." In the face of such anguish, the angels came again to comfort and serve him. His temptations and tests were very real and intense, even though he did not fall and could not fall. His temptations were infinitely greater than ours. He could not fail, could not falter one little bit and still be our Savior. We can never say, we must never say, "Jesus doesn't understand what I'm going through."

Our King, the Lamb of God, took away the sin of the world. Our King reigns and helps us today with all of our struggles on account of his struggle, his victory is his eternal crown. He is Christ our King. Holy, precious, pure, loving—all of the things we are not, except that he has brought us along as the bride, the Church, forever in Jesus. Amen.