

Session 9: Dark in the Heart, but Lovely to God

In this session, session 9, we are looking at Song of Solomon 1:5. We are covering the studies through the book of the Song of Solomon in twenty-four sessions. We are applying it spiritually to King Jesus, as He woos His Bride to bring her forth in holy and mature love before Him.

Now the Song of Solomon is properly understood as extolling and magnifying the beauty of married love. That is how the song was written as a natural love song, but the Holy Spirit who glorifies Jesus also parallels it to our relationship with Jesus. Everywhere in the Scripture, we know that He is glorifying Jesus in the relationship of the believer before Him as the King of Kings, and also as the Bridegroom God.

OUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH PARADOX OF GRACE: DARK YET LOVELY

Song of Songs 1:5-6: The bride says, “I am dark, but lovely.” She is speaking of dark in her heart, but lovely to God in verse five: “O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me, because I am dark.” In this passage the bride’s spiritual journey is just beginning. We have looked the last several sessions on the introduction and the bride’s life vision of running with the Lord and being drawn to Him in Song of Solomon 1:4. We looked at the theme of the song in Song of Songs 1:2.

Now we are actually looking at her spiritual journey, and what she experiences with the Lord as she walks with Him starting here in Song of Songs 1:5. Her journey begins with a spiritual crisis. Now this spiritual crisis is common to every believer who is fervent for the Lord.

We see this spiritual crisis in the two-fold confession that she is giving before the Lord: that she is dark in her heart. That is one-part of the confession. She acknowledges her sinfulness, but then she declares boldly, “But I am lovely before You” (Song 1:5).

Now this is what I call the paradox of grace. At the beginning of every believer’s journey, they run into this conflict, this tension of the paradox of grace where we discover how dark we are at the heart: that is a growing revelation, or a growing discovery, when the light of the Holy Spirit begins to shine we only see a little bit.

The more light we receive, the more light we obey the Holy Spirit gives us more and more light.

LIKE A SLIDE UNDER A MICROSCOPE, WHEN THE LIGHT OF GOD SHINES

The analogy that I have used over the years is like looking a slide under a magnifying glass, or under a microscope. The slide can get all cleaned up, and then they turn it up to ten power, the slide then looks dirty again. Then, you get it all cleaned up, and then they can turn it to a hundred power. The more magnified power than the more we see what we did not see before. That is the same way it is with walking in the light of the Holy Spirit. The more light we have, the more light God gives us. He keeps moving the magnifying power up tenfold.

The more mature we get in the grace of God, actually the more darkness we see in our life. We think it would be opposite. You might think that the cleaner we are, the more unaware we would be of our sin. But it is exactly the opposite. Now, it is essential for our spiritual growth that as we grow with a greater revelation of our pride, our sin, our darkness, we must grow in an equal revelation of our loveliness before the Lord. Now, it is the combination of these two truths, the darkness of our hearts, and our loveliness before God. That produces spiritual growth. When we see the darkness of our heart, then we feel. We feel gratitude before the Lord. We feel humility before the Lord when we see the darkness of our heart. It causes us to walk lowly of heart and to walk poor in spirit. Then, when we see how lovely we are before God that gives us confidence and gratitude in our spirit as well.

BOTH DARK AND LOVELY

Now some groups—many groups— focus on the darkness of heart, some holiness groups, they really emphasize how dark the human heart is. I think that is a very important emphasis.

If we do not emphasize equally or even more so how lovely we are in God's sight, then our confidence is destroyed in our relationship with the Lord. It produces shame in our life instead of confidence. What the Holy Spirit is after is producing believers through each season of their life where they have confidence before the Lord in love. They have confidence that God loves them no matter what stage of growth they are in.

They also have confidence, secondly, that the love they have is genuine and the Lord sees it as real even though it is weak. It is not enough to only know that God

loves us. We want to know that our love is real. Because our love is weak, does not mean it is false. Because our love is flawed, does not mean it is hypocritical. It is real even when it is weak, young, and new. Now some groups that get really focused particularly upon the darkness of the heart and that is all that they focus on. They are very zealous for the Lord, and I honor them for that. The people end up becoming paralyzed by shame in their relationship with the Lord. They are just overwhelmed with great humility as to how bad they are. There is more in our relationship with God than having humility in the knowledge of how bad we are. He wants us confident in love. He wants us grateful before Him in love, bold in our spirit before Him.

JEREMIAH HAD REVELATION OF THE DEPTH AND DECEITFULNESS OF SIN

In Jeremiah 17:9, Jeremiah gave us tremendous understanding of the depth of the sin of the human heart. When I was younger in the Lord this verse seemed a little bit out there. You know it seemed like, “Wow I am sure it is true, but it seems a little intense.” When I was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, I felt I was so devoted to the Lord and going so strong. I knew I had some issues, but I thought well those things would be behind me in just a minute. “Man I am just going from glory to glory.!” There is a truth of that, but I did not understand that. I would see more about my own heart as time went on. Jeremiah said the heart is deceitful above everything else. There is nothing more deceitful than the human heart. Your own heart will deceive you.

It is desperately wicked. He gives the question: Who could really know their full capacity for darkness? Who could really understand what they are capable of if the grace of God was not restraining them? Now that seems like I would think that is probably true. As I have watched the years unfold, have seen things in my own heart and have seen it in the lives of others I believe this verse more and more as the years even now the decades are unfolding one-by-one.

It says in Ephesians 4:22, Paul called the lusts of the heart “deceitful lusts,” because they deceive us. When we think they are under control they rear up. When we think that they are not about to reach out and grab us, those lusts of deceit, those deceitful lusts work their terrible work in our emotions, then of course, then in our lifestyle.

PAUL, THE MATURE APOSTLE, SAW HIMSELF AS A CHIEF AMONG SINNERS

Now, Paul, the apostle, described himself as chief among sinners. Now, here he is a mature apostle, and he said Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the chief of all the sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15. We might think, “Paul you do not really mean that as a mature apostle? Surely you are exaggerating with a little bit of false humility in there!”

That is not really what was happening. Paul had more light than was common in any time in history I am sure. I am sure that there is very few that have entered into the level of relationship with the Lord that Paul walked in. The more light that he had, the more clearly he saw the darkness in his heart. Now it is true that our flesh is weak. Our flesh is sinful. Having a dark heart and dark desires, that is not the whole truth about you. It is true, but it is not the whole truth.

There is something that is equally true even more powerful in terms of its impact on us. It is how God sees us and what God has made us to be in His sight by the grace of God. So when someone talks about their sin, it is true, and it is probably that their problem is far bigger than they understand—but it is not the whole truth about them. It is not even the most powerful truth about them. Yet that is the truth that the enemy magnifies in our heart. Of course, that is the truth that those who are near us are quick to point out.

THOUGH WE ARE SURPRISED BY SIN, GOD DOES NOT RECONSIDER HIS LOVE

Beloved, we need to be quick to point out how God sees those that we are relating to. Not just the truth about how bad they are, but also the truth about how beautiful they are in the presence of God. I remember in my early days I was among a group of young people. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, we were all going to be missionaries and go to the mission field, praying for revival or believing God for great things. Let’s say it that way. We did not really have any, too many prayer meetings. We were, just really had a big vision to touch the nations, so just a lot of young people on fire. I remember as I became eighteen, nineteen, twenty went to school, college university, I was just surprised at, at things that happened in my heart.

I was just surprised at, at lust, anger, confusion, disappointment at God, lack of trusting Him, just all kinds. There are many categories of darkness that work in the

human heart. I thought that as I was surprised by these new dimensions of sin, which incidentally when you are surprised by your sin that is a statement about your pride. You know he that is most surprised is most proud. It should not surprise us but it did. I said, “Oh Lord can you believe it?” You know. So the Lord might have responded, “You know, well in your case, I cannot. I am sure the Lord could have said something like: “Do not worry there is a lot more where that came from.”

THE DEGREE OUR OWN SIN SURPRISES US IS THE DEGREE OF OUR PRIDE

Anyway, I had this certain emotion as I grew in greater understanding of my darkness that God must be surprised when I am surprised. I had an interesting way of thinking about it. I thought, “Oh no! With this new information that just came across the ranks of heaven, Bickle is worse than we thought. Mike Bickle—he is worse.” I thought that with the new information that God was going to renegotiate my entire relationship with Him based on the latest info. That sounds funny. It is strange how that gets a hold of us.

The truth is that God knew how dark our hearts were before we ever were born again, before we ever responded to Him, He wanted us with a lot greater knowledge of the darkness that we had then, and even a lot greater knowledge of our capacity for sin then we have and He wanted us. He is not going to change His mind in midstream.

GOD DOES NOT LOOK TO US TO MOTIVATE HIS PASSION FOR US

God does not look to us to supply the motivation for His passion for us. He is motivated by His own character in His zeal for us. He does not need me to bring something to the relationship that goes that seals the deal now for sure I love you. He loved me when I had no concern for Him whatsoever. Now, if we are going to grow consistently in the grace of God, we have to have both sides of this paradox— both dimensions of this truth.

We have to know that we are lovely to God. It is critical we know that. I do not just mean the terminology. You know people here at the International House of Prayer they hang around for a few months. They get the terminology down. That does not mean it is rooted in their heart.

It is not enough to have the terminology that we are lovely to God even in our weakness, but when that revelation touches us as we are in the process of

discovering more of the darkness of our heart, it profoundly touches us. Again it produces great humility when we see the darkness, and great confidence and great gratitude, when we see our loveliness before Him.

Some are so extremely sincere in their repentance. I mean they are so sincere. They could not become more sincere, but they do not experience as Song of Solomon 1:3 or 1:2 love that is better than wine, but they do not experience the exhilaration or the delight of their relationship with God. Though they are very sincere, they only have one half of the equation. They can not feel the pleasure of walking with God even in their immaturity. Their hope is that one day in the resurrection, they will feel good about their relationship with God. Between now and then, they will feel bad each step of the way to prove their sincerity.

FOUR REASONS WHY WE ARE BEAUTIFUL TO GOD IN OUR WEAKNESS

We are beautiful to God even in our weakness. There are four reasons why we are beautiful to God. I am only going to touch these. Number one reason why we are beautiful to God: because we receive the gift of righteousness. Jesus literally gave His righteousness to us. Did you know the righteousness you received the day you were born again can not be improved upon? It is the righteousness of God. It is not the righteousness almost like God. It is the righteousness of God. God's quality of righteousness can not ever be improved upon. You received all of it the day you were born again as a gift.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Do you know a billion years from now, in God's sight, you will not be more righteous than you are right now in terms of your standing before Him? Do you know that Jesus is not more righteous in God's sight than you are? That is the stunning reality of the gift of righteousness.

It is His gift. It is His righteousness that He gave us freely.

WE HAVE A WILLING SPIRIT

The second reason we are lovely, we are beautiful to God, even in our weakness: Because we have a willing spirit. When we were born again, the Holy Spirit worked in our heart and the Holy Spirit imparted to us a desire to say "yes" to God. It is a sincere desire to obey Him. It is a "yes" in our spirit. Every movement of our heart towards God, God delights in it. Now this "yes," that is in your spirit. Where did that come from? It did not come from the devil. It did not come from your

flesh. It is a supernatural work of God.

When God sees that “yes” in your spirit, that longing to be, to obey Him, to trust Him, and to do the will of God, it moves Him when He sees that “yes” in your spirit, when He sees a willing spirit.

The third reason that God, that we are lovely to God even in our weakness, is the nature of God’s personality. Our beauty to God is partly related to God’s personality: the fact that His emotional makeup, the very affections that burn in Him, the desire He has for us because of His personality, because of His emotions that is why He has the capacity to look at us as lovely before Him.

**TRUE NATURE OF GOD’S PERSONALITY:
BEAUTY IS IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER**

Never has it been more true—beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. The beholder, the one that is looking at us has got such a heart-filled with passion, tenderness and love. It is through the eyes of such a God that He esteems us as beautiful in the gift of righteousness. Now if God was mostly angry, He does have anger in His personality, but if God was mostly angry no matter how much of a willing spirit we had, He would not view us as lovely. He would be mad at us. It is because of who He is. He just sees things so totally different than we see things. That is awesome.

It was the prophet Samuel that told King David’s father when they were selecting the new king of Israel. David was just a boy, seventeen years old. When Samuel chose David’s older brothers, he had seven older brothers, and Samuel chose each one of them. David was the final one. Here is what the Lord says to Samuel: He says, “Samuel do not look at his appearance because God does not see the way man sees.” That is a radical statement. Man looks at the outward appearance. I am going to add a word. Man looks at the outward performance. God looks at the movements of the heart.

MAN LOOKS AT OUTWARD APPEARANCE AND PERFORMANCE

That is what God looks at is the movements of the heart. So God, the reason He looks at the movements of the heart is because of the type of God He is. That is why when we study the emotions of God; it gets us more established in the truth that we are lovely to God. We begin to see a happy God-filled with delight. There is a chance He will have delight towards us. He is angry, distant, railing, ready to

smash us, and all He sees is darkness in us. There is not a chance we are going to have confidence in our spirit before God. I just know so many sincere believers in thirty years of ministry. I mean as sincere as can be and they just have almost no confidence when they stand before God. They are sincere, but they are kind of waiting between now and the time they meet the Lord on a spiritual probation, just hoping God will be nice to them because they do not understand His heart.

GOD SEES US THROUGH OUR ETERNAL DESTINY AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Now, the fourth reason we are lovely to God is that God sees us through our eternal destiny as the Bride of Christ. In other words, the Lord does not just see that you are today, next week, and the last month, or two or year. He sees who you are through the lens of a billion years, ten billion years, a billion, billion years. When He looks at you, He does not only see what is going on in a short time frame. He sees the whole of who we are, and what we do before Him.

It is an understatement to say even He has a grasp of the big picture. He sees the big picture. He knows who we are to Him forever, and it moves His heart even now. I am going to look at just a moment at the life of Peter, the gospel of Matthew. Well it is in all the gospels.

PETER’S EARLY STRUGGLES: DARK BUT LOVELY, WEAK BUT WILLING

Peter’s struggle in his early days, at the end of Jesus’ three and half year ministry, is right at the time of the cross when Peter denies the Lord three times. It is only the beginning of Peter’s ministry on the earth. He goes on for many decades more. This struggle begins in Luke 22:31, when the Lord tells Peter: “Peter, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat.” Like Peter is thinking, “Wow—that is a strange feeling that Satan is demanding.”

Requesting—but it is a stronger word than requesting permission to sift him—Satan wants to test him to the core of his being. Jesus says you will deny Me three times. Peter does not like this at all. He says, “but your faith will not fail” (Luke 22:31).

YOUR FAITH WILL NOT FAIL

Now wait a second, if you deny the Lord three times does that not equal your faith failing? The Lord was looking at Peter through the lens of Peter’s whole life, and

Peter's heart before Him. He knew that Peter would stumble that very night when He was telling Him that. So He gives, in the garden, He gives Peter a two-fold understanding of Peter's heart, and even the heart of the redeemed and how our heart works as a believer. He looks at Peter, and He says: "Peter the spirit." He is talking to him. He says, "You know you are going to be tempted and you are going to deny me tonight. Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak."

Peter did not like this. He did not even pay attention to the part that said "your spirit is willing." He said, "Whatever that means. I am, my flesh is not weak, I am not going to deny You."

Now, I want to assure you of this. One of the Holy Spirit's missions, one of His goals in your life is to convince you of the weakness of your flesh, so you do not trust in the flesh, nor do you boast in it—even in your attainments in God. Many have done that through the years. The Lord uses them to make an impact in ministry or even a certain. Their life seemingly gets together in a certain way and they boast in it in the flesh as though it was just purely their dedication and it was their awesome discipline.

They boast in the flesh. Now one of the Spirit's goals is that we would not trust in our flesh, nor would we boast in it when we make an impact, or even when our life gets disciplined and in order. So He tells Peter, "Your flesh is weak." Now the issue of the hour here in the Song of Solomon: What is the bride going to do? What are you going to do when you discover the weakness of your flesh? That is the great crisis point of every believer. So many believers when the crisis comes, and they see the weakness of their flesh. They really love God so it is a crisis. Now if you do not love God, seeing that your flesh is weak is not a problem. So what? But if you really love God, and you do, finding out how weak you are in your flesh, it is a scandal to your heart. You hate it. You hate it like nothing else in life.

TO RUN TO GOD AND NOT FROM GOD

It is a full crisis in our life when we have this. If we do not understand what God is thinking, when we have a growing understanding of the weakness of our flesh, we will run from Him instead of to Him. Of course, that is just what the devil wants. He wants our heart to be shut down, filled with shame, paralyzed with shame, condemnation, so we close our spirit from the Lord and though we love Him we will not have confidence because beloved if we feel dirty we will live dirty. It is really true.

You get a person set in the most horrible week, month, or year, and they are ready to repent, they still feel dirty, it is critical we help through the word of God, and by the Holy Spirit to feel clean. If you live dirty, if you feel dirty you will continue to live dirty. When you feel clean, your spirit gets bold and strong—this is not just a nice doctrine. This is an issue of life and death—this doctrine. Well Peter denied the Lord, as you know, three times. Peter is absolutely overwhelmed with grief, the sense of betrayal of his own heart to himself. I mean more so, his heart, his sense of betrayal to the Lord, but he just, I could just picture Him saying, “I cannot believe this. This is not possible. My whole life is over. My whole life is ruined. Everything I believed in I have done the opposite of.”

PETER’S DESPAIRE BECAUSE OF HIS FAILURE WHEN HE DENIED THE LORD

Then John 21:3 it is a very interesting passage. It is a very significant one. It says in John 21:3, Peter said to the rest of the guys, “There I am going fishing.”

They said, “We are going with you.” They went out and immediately they got in the boat, and they caught nothing. Now the question of the hour is why is Peter fishing? He is not fishing for money. It is only eight days after the crucifixion of Jesus. They had so much money that Judas was stealing it and they did not even know any was gone. It is only a week later. They have got plenty of money. They are not fishing for recreation because they are fishing all night long. They are working. This is not a Sunday afternoon you know kind of a little time out to go fish. No it is not recreation.

PETER IS RESIGNING FROM HIS APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

Peter is going fishing because he is resigning from his apostolic leadership to take up the family business again. This is a full resignation in his heart before God. When Peter said, “I am going fishing,” he was making a huge statement. “Let’s get the boats back, and let’s start the business up. I love Him, I love Jesus but I am completely disqualified to serve Him in the way that He has been talking to me about in the last three and a half years. I am going to return to the family business.”

He was actually changing occupations is what he was doing. Now there is nothing wrong with leaving the ministry for an occupation in the market place. There is nothing wrong with that, but it was for Peter because he was called by Jesus to be an apostle. The Lord has many of His chief leaders assigned to the market place. It is not the fact that he went from “professional” ministry to the market place. That

is not it. It is the fact; it is why he did it. He said, “I can not bear the, I can not bear this anymore. I am so unfaithful to my leader, in my leadership. I cannot do this again. If I cannot bear up under the pressures of a little servant girl and I deny the Lord, I will never ever be able to trust myself. I will never be sure that I will be steady in the presence of God, I will be faithful.”

How could I be faithful for a lifetime, if I cannot even be faithful to Jesus? You know a little six-year old girl says, “I think you know Jesus.”

“No, I do not. No, I do not.” It says that he began to cuss and curse. He is so wounded by his failure. He is so disappointed in his heart. The feeling he has in relationship with the Lord, he does not want to face the Lord. He has so much grief. I mean the crisis of the weakness of his flesh has overtaken him. Now, what happens in the crisis of the weakness of our flesh when we discover it, you know in a huge failure?

THE CRISIS OF DISCOVERING THE WEAKNESS OF OUR OWN FLESH

Many people have a huge failure a couple times in their life. I am not prophesying that to anybody. I am not saying we have to. I am just saying I have watched so many do it. I am not saying most do it but many, many believers in the course of ten, twenty, thirty, forty years they have a couple huge failures in their life where they did not do what the Holy Spirit was really pressing their heart to do.

Now, what happens is that when people fail, they resign from their high vision in God. What do I mean by that? Well our high, the, the highest vision we could have in God is not that we are going to fill the stadium and win the city. That is a good vision if it is the Lord.

The highest vision that you can have for your life is that you would love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your strength, and all of your mind. That is the highest vision the human spirit can have. The highest vision is not how radical of an impact, doing the strangest thing and believing for not a billion, ten billion—you know that is not the highest vision. That might be right, and it might be wrong. There are different ideas that people get, but there is nothing that will replace the vision of our calling to love God with all of our heart, to be a whole-hearted lover of God. We would love the Lord our God with our entire mind, all of our mind and all of our strength.

Now, what happens is when people fail in God, they get rid of that part of their vision. It is really painful. I have watched people do this over the year. They lower their vision, so they do not have the pain of reaching to go wholehearted for God, or all out for God. When they reach they fail, they come up short sometimes. When they come up short, the pain is so great, and the disappointment is so severe they would rather not reach and fail. They would rather just settle into a lower vision in God. I have watched this so many times I am sad. The multitudes of times I have watched people on fire for the Lord for five or ten years, and then the next twenty years, they still love the Lord. They are still born again. They still value the Word of God. They do not read it much. They still have a remembrance of being fiery in their spirit, but what they loose sight of is it has been ten or twenty years. They were thinking maybe it has just been a few years ago. It has been a long time. The reason that they do this is because they settle in.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN IN HEAVEN

They accept being a second-class citizen in the kingdom. There is no such thing. They settle into this because they say that this idea of reaching, “I am going to be disciplined and focused. I am going to bridle my eyes and my tongue. All my money belongs to God, and all my time.”

They come up short so often they just acclimate to a whole second-class status in their own thinking. They say, “You know, I will just fund the youth group. I had zeal when I was young, and I am just going to sit back and be a cheerleader for others.” It is not that they do not love God. They do love God. They love God as much as they did in those early days.

IT IS BETTER TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST, THAN NEVER TO LOVE AT ALL

It is the old saying. You have heard it said, and I am going to mess it up: it is better to have loved and lost, than never to love at all—something like that. I have got it. It is better to love and lost, than never to have loved at all. That is it—the pain of reaching for love has in it the risk of loosing. Many people in their relationship with God would rather not love with all their heart because they are afraid, they might loose so they draw back and just settle in.

They do not have a vision for a spirit of prayer. They used to. They do not have a vision to know the Word. They used to. They do not have a vision to believe God

with their finances. They just keep all their finances, and throw a little bit here and there that they give away. It is not because they do not love Him. They cannot face the issue of failing Him. What do they do? They just go fishing. Now, I am not talking about occupation. They get into a mindset where it feels safe, but they acknowledge that they lowered their vision because God is angry at them and disappointed.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Now, what happens in John 21, Jesus meets Peter right after this fishing incident, right there on the beach. He asks him the same question three times in a row. He says, “Peter do you love Me?” It says in John 21:15, “Do you love Me more than these?” When He said, “Do you love Me more than these,” Jesus was not pointing at the eight disciples that were there. He is not saying do you love me more than them?

He would say, “Are You kidding, I denied You, no absolutely not!” He points at the fish in verse fifteen, and He asks, “Do you love Me more than these?” Do you love Me enough to face your failure and trust Me to uphold you in your failure? That is the critical question.

Do you love Me more than giving up to find a comfort zone in the spirit that is a disaster for your life, or will you trust Me in your failure to hold your heart, and to be with you, and to love you, and not turn My back on you? Many believers would rather just draw back than trust the Lord. It is so vulnerable, and their heart is wide open. What if the Lord does not love them in the way that He used to? What if they are wrong about this?

So Peter said to Him, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.”

Then Jesus said, “Feed My lambs.” In John 21:16, Jesus said to him a second time: “Do you love Me?”

Peter is thinking, “I do not like this question. I failed You, Jesus, eight days ago. You know that I know. I know that You know I know. Why are You doing this to me? Do you love Me?”

I can picture Peter gulping, thinking, “I am a hypocrite Jesus. I mean You want me just to say it. I failed You. I am just a hypocrite.”

Jesus says, “Tell Me, do you love Me?”

I can still see Peter kind of mumbling: “Yes, Lord, yes. You know I love You.”

“Peter I did not hear you. Say it louder.”

Peter’s response, “Uh, yes I love You. Yeah, of course, I love You.”

“Peter look Me in the eyes, and tell Me.”

Peter’s reply, “I cannot look You in the eyes and say this right now Lord. I know what I did to You just a week ago.”

But Jesus says, “Tell Me Peter do you love Me?”

In John 21:17, then He came to him the third time: “Simon do you love Me?”

He was grieved. Peter sadly says, “Why are You telling me this? I mean asking me this three times in a row? You are torturing my heart.” Peter is grieved by these questions. This is getting right to the heart of his failure.

What is going on? I can picture Jesus saying, “Peter do you remember eight days ago? We were in the garden of Gethsemane together. I told you that you had a willing spirit, but you had weak flesh.

I can see Peter responding, “Well, yeah, of course, I remember.”

Jesus asks Peter, “You did not believe you had a weak flesh did you?”

Peter answers Jesus, “Lord I am so sorry. I know I did not.”

Jesus speaks, “Peter that is not what I am talking about right now, I was right you had weak flesh. You did not believe it, but I was also right about another part of you. I said, ‘your spirit was willing.’ Do you remember I told you that?”

Peter responds, “Well, yeah, now that You mention it I never even thought much about that.” A person who does not know how weak their flesh is the idea of

having a willing spirit they kind of take it for granted.

Jesus said, “Peter, before you even responded to Me, I saw your spirit. I saw the “yes” in your spirit before we ever met. I saw the “yes” in your spirit before you ever failed Me. I saw the “yes” in your spirit even now. Even now, I see the “yes” in your spirit.”

Peter is saying, “Lord, but I failed You.”

Jesus says, “Peter, all you see is your weak flesh. I see your willing spirit, and your weak flesh.” Jesus asked him to tell Him the third time. The third time he is grieved. Then said to the Lord in John 21:17, “Lord You know all things. What a statement. You know all things. You know that I love You. In other words, You do not just know I have weak flesh. You know my spirit. You know what are the movements of my heart. You know everything about me.”

I could see Jesus saying, “Peter you have it now, you have it now.” See what had happened was that Peter denied the Lord three times, so the Lord asked Peter the question three times. For each denial, He makes Peter say what is true about his own heart. Jesus was not asking the question for Jesus’ sake. How many of you know that when God asks you a question He is not asking you the question because God does not know the answer. Every time in the scripture that God asks a question He is not looking for information. The question is going to bring the person He is talking to information.

RESTORATION OF LOVE

The problem was not that Jesus did not know that Peter loved Him. The problem was that Peter did not know that Peter loved Him. So three times, He is breaking the power of shame in Peter’s life. He is restoring Peter back to the relationship of confidence that he had before he failed.

Beloved, it is the same thing that the Lord is doing in our lives. He makes us declare what the bride said in the Song of Solomon 1:5: “I am dark of heart.” My flesh is weak and that produces humility. The more we see it, the more humility we have. That is not the whole truth. Peter said, “Lord, You know everything. You know all things. You do not know half the truth about me. You know the whole truth about me, and You see the willing spirit in my heart. We stand before the Lord, and we say Lord our flesh is weak, but our spirit is willing. We say, “We are

dark in our heart, but we are lovely. We are lovely before You. Lord, we know our sin, but You love me, and You know that I love You.”

Beloved, the Lord sees the genuineness of the love of a sincere believer with all of our weakness. He sees it genuine. I say this all the time. It bears repeating. I have said it already a couple of times this session.

WEAK, IMMATURE LOVE IS STILL SINCERE

We think that because our love is weak that our love is false. Weak love, immature love is not false love. It is just that. It is weak. It is still real though. Peter’s love eight days after his failure was real. It was not as mature, as it was going to be, but it was real. The Lord, it was not enough that Peter knew that God loved him. Peter needed to know that God believed that Peter loved Him. So Jesus is restoring confidence in Peter’s heart. That is part of a critical part of our confession with the Lord.

It is critical that we do not just stay that “I blew it, I blew it, I blew it, I blew it.” We have to go the other end that I am lovely before God. Now some people, not very many, some people go to another extreme. They are so into “I am lovely before God,” they never acknowledge their sin, and they are never aware of the darkness that is in their heart. They get so into the doctrine that “I am lovely to God” that they plan to things that are sinful. They actually plan them out, go, and do them, and they plan to claim the doctrine “I am lovely to God. That is presumptuous. That is in error. Not many of them do that, most of them are on the other end. They sincerely love God, but they do not have a revelation of their loveliness to Him.

Amen. Let’s stand before the Lord. We are going to offer this confession to Him. You can read the rest of the notes. I have a few more ideas and explanations about Song of Songs 1.