



When We Aren't In The Mood

Song of Songs 5:2-6:3

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If Jesus were to write a letter to our church, what might it say? What would be his admonition, in our cultural moment, in our stage of life? As a thought experiment, we actually don't have to wander far for an example. In the first few chapters of the book of Revelation, John the apostle receives a vision from the Lord himself, with instructions to send his vision to individual, local churches. Seven churches receive direct instruction from God.

Ephesus is patient in their endurance, but they have lost the luster of their first love and the zeal of repentance. Smyrna must wake up to suffering that is coming. Pergamum and Thyatira are charged to stop harboring false teaching. Sardis has a good reputation, but is flirting with spiritual deadness. Philadelphia is in danger of giving up when they have endured well for so long. Laodicea is famously lukewarm. What do all of the churches have in common? For each of them, they have been following Jesus for a while. They have seen suffering, they have been faithful. But the Christian life is not linear. Each of these churches, some more than others, are in need of a wake up call to the reality that to bear the name of Christ is not a walk in the park. When we first come to faith, we all remember the spiritual vitality that followed, sometimes compared to a "high" or a "mountaintop". But even Moses had to come down the mountain to find the golden calf. All of us are prone to spiritual valleys, to times where we just don't really "feel it" anymore.

Often I think of the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. How could they sleep on that night, when they knew Jesus was to be betrayed? How could they not stay up for just a few hours into the darkness of morning after that climactic dinner in the presence of the Son of God? It's simple: all of us who have ever experienced the heart-stopping miracle of being loved by Jesus at times just aren't feeling it anymore. Whether it's opposition, false ideas, or just plain old apathy—we are always in danger of spiritual numbness.

Today in the Song of Songs it is portrayed in this way: there are times when Jesus comes knocking, ready to meet us and show us the joy of his love... and we just aren't in the mood. I trust you can relate. For whatever reason, spiritual intimacy with Jesus just doesn't always appeal to us. What do we do then? Let's look now at the text and see God's kind Word to us.



When We Aren't In The Mood... (5:2-8)

Remember last time in Song of Songs we saw a poetic description of a wedding night—the consummation of a marriage—as the groom described his bride’s physical beauty in a way that highlighted her spiritual and theological significance in the text. The bride was likened to a faithful Israel, to Eden, to the garden of perfection, and the very temple of God. Such is the way Jesus sees us, his people and his bride, when we are clothed in his righteousness. Nothing could be more exciting than that reality expressed. It’s why directly before our passage in **5:2**, the chorus of on-lookers rejoices and encourages intimacy. Put very simply: it’s a spiritual high, a mountaintop, a representation of the times in life where we feel close to Jesus and hear his rejoicing over us, and a picture of the time to come where we will hear him rejoice over us face to face.

But immediately, a different scene is presented. Remember, Song of Songs is not necessarily linear. But what we have in chapter 5 is a scene where the bride and groom are again separated. For whatever reason: it is late, and they are not together. **Verse 2** gives us the idea that perhaps this is a dream—another nightmare like in chapter 3, when the bride could not find her groom. But in chapter 3, the fuel of nightmare was a difference of proximity, the fuel of the nightmare in chapter 5 is a difference in desire. It’s night, she is sleeping, and she hears a sudden noise that jolts her awake. Her beloved is back home, knocking on the door in **verse 2**. The beloved has kind, sweet words condensed in several short words—we can tell that his intent is to spend time with his bride, that his desire is for her. His head being wet means that he has been outside for a while—perhaps a long walk home. This doesn’t bother him though. Now that the wedding has come and gone, his bride is no longer a “locked garden”, and he is eager to be with her. His words imply both relational desire (my sister, my love) and physical desire (my dove, my perfect one). One word he doesn’t use again is “bride”, the legal term—perhaps, as one commentator suggests, because although he is asking to come in and be intimate with her, he doesn’t want to appeal to any sort of legal obligation that she might have to oblige, a far cry from the kind of behavior that was typical of husbands and men in that day (and still in ours).¹ He is making a request of her, but not a demand.

We relate to the bride in **verse 3**. So often Christ comes to us in the times and places where excuses feel easy. It is never difficult to pray when we are in desperate need—but much harder to seek intimacy with God when we are comfortable, distracted, or content. She has already taken off her robe, washed her feet—warm and cozy in her bed. Now isn’t the time, she says, I’m not in the mood. When we are not in the mood, we often make **excuses**. What kind of excuses are we making?

It is so interesting that the image comes to us in this way, because in marriage we know it’s a certifiable fact that we are never *always* in the mood for intimacy—be it emotional or sexual. It takes work to make real connections that awaken holy desire. It’s not always convenient. And don’t hear me saying that we must always “be in the mood” in marriage. This is a give and take—again hear the husband’s kind patience in **verse 4**. Instead of storming off, insisting, or drooping his head

¹ Ian Duguid, *Song of Songs*



after being turned away—he put his hand to the latch, or literally, through the keyhole. I believe the idea is not that he is trying to break in, but that he is leaving something behind by touching the door.² That something is his perfume—myrrh on the handles of the bolt, **verse 5**. Myrrh is an expensive, royal perfume—a blessing and a treat. In leaving it behind, he is saying to his bride: “I am not angry. Although you have turned me away, I still wish to bless you.” Myrrh is also the scent associated most with the temple of God—reminding us again that this romance is meant to point us to the holy love of God and his people.

There are many days that we don’t have the energy or emotion for intimacy with Christ. It is easier to peruse our phones upon waking than spend time in solitude or prayer. Walking into the office, the computer and the meetings and the emails call out much louder than even just a short time of calling out to God. The scripture feels to us when we are tired after a long day of just empty words on a page. The gathering of the saints has no special luster at times. The preaching of the word has no special power. But Jesus Christ is consistently crying out to us: “open up and meet with me. I am not too busy for you”, he says. He is not demanding of us a sacrifice to please him like some Pagan deity—he is gently drawing us.

But even when we turn Christ away, he doesn’t leave us empty handed. His spirit exudes his aroma of grace to us, like Myrrh. All around us we are sustained and held by his power—we enjoy his blessings. See, if you are like me, you are prone to guilt for all the times where you have rejected Christ with excuses. But he isn’t knocking on the door to guilt-trip you. Instead, he is leaving evidence of his grace all over to draw you back to him again, to awaken your desire again, to wake you from your lukewarmness. This is what happens for the bride in our poem. When she finally awoke to her beloved’s desire, her desire was awakened too. **Verse 4** says her heart was thrilled within—literally her “insides were stirred”. This unique phrase is the exact language used for Israel in Jeremiah 31:20 to describe God’s longing for Israel. She now feels again the love and desire from her wedding night. But the problem is, it is too late. **Verse 6-7** describe her feelings. In **verse 9** she says she is “sick with love”. This is not the lovesickness of delight, but of despair. She deeply regrets not opening the door to her beloved. No inconvenience was worth missing such a joy.

It is God’s grace, not his wrath, that often causes us to feel distance from him. Multiple times the scripture warns that when we seek after God after rejecting him, we may not find him right away. What he is doing is disciplining us—helping us to awaken our desire and see again our need for him—tuning our hearts and desires in an imperfect world. He is not actually distant or far, for Christ never abandons us. But the feeling of seeking and not finding is often the way God helps us to continue seeking, to awake from our spiritual stupor.

In **verse 7** there is an interesting consequence of her rejection of her beloved. The watchmen of the city find her and abuse her physically. Presumably, they mistake her again for a prostitute, and are trying to teach her a lesson. Remember that this scene comes to us as a poetic nightmare—she imagines just how difficult it would be. When we are not in the mood, we are often met by

² Jim Hamilton, *Song of Songs*



opposition. Here the bride imagines it as cruel guards—but we know that when we turn down the offer of Christ, we are often met with a spiral effect. Distractions oppose us, calling our attention. Responsibilities cry out to us for attention. Less loves, easier loves and desires, seem more attractive than holiness. But in the end, they leave us broken and bruised. Whether it be excuses or opposition, we all know what it is like to say “I’m not in the mood” to Christ. The question we need answering is “how can we come out of our spiritual stupor?” How can we regain a lost desire and passion for Christ?” The rest of this text is not a formula, but does provide great help.

Meditate On His Worth (5:8-16)

Sometimes the best thing we can do when we feel spiritually not in the mood is to ask for help. This is what the bride does in **verse 8**. And her bridesmaids don’t give her advice: instead, they ask her a question. “What is it you love about your beloved?” What a powerful question—instead of drawing attention to how we feel, to our guilt or our lost opportunity, it draws our attention back to the worth of the beloved. Perhaps this a question we can ask each other often: why is following Jesus worth it? What do you find beautiful and attractive about Jesus?

The bride, stirred by this, cannot help but launch into a beautiful poetic description of her beloved. It is a parallel to the description given by him in chapter 4. Although she is describing his physical appearance from the top down, she highlights pictures and images that show spiritual significance. I want you to notice in **verses 10-16** that the primary marker of his description in her eyes is that of matchless worthiness. None can compare to him. He is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. This is Davidic language: David is described as ruddy or red in appearance, one who has slain “ten thousand”. There is no king comparable to David in the Hebrew canon. Notice too the language of precious metals and gems. Gold, jewels, ivory, sapphires, alabaster—all of it denoting his precious worth. He drips myrrh, that precious fragrance.. His cheeks are like a bed of sweet smelling herbs and spices. When put all thought, **verse 15**, he is like Lebanon cedars: the best of the best in terms of lumber, used for the temple. He is, **verse 16**, “altogether desirable”.

I find it fascinating that what is being described here is almost a verbal picture of an image. Like a statue of a famous hero or even a pagan god—the bride paints the beloved in gold and alabaster, literally a “sculpting marble”. Baylor has erected a statue of RG3 outside the football stadium—humanity is always drawn to images. There is even a link to the dream of Daniel and the image of Nebuchadnezzar—whose shoes were not gold but clay. Here is a picture of a king who is worthy to be deified. But remember God has commanded us not to make images of him. What this verbal image is pointing us to then is not an idol meant to look like God but rather the very image of God. Jesus Christ is the physical representation of all of God—the image of God lifted up. Nebuchadnezzar erected his own image and so defied God—but when we lift Jesus up as greater and more excellent than any other, as worthy of all our praise, when we remember his worth—we honor God. Only Jesus is worthy beyond comparison.



We have a simple tool to lift us out of our spiritual apathy and excuses: to meditate on the matchless worth of Jesus Christ. The puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon “The Excellency Of Christ” labors to help us. What he says is that in Christ there is not only majesty and beauty, but a mix of the most unlikely excellencies. He calls it “an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies”. In Jesus Christ, he says, we find: Infinite highness and infinite condescension; Infinite justice and infinite grace; infinite majesty and transcendent meekness; the deepest reverence towards God and equality with God; infinite worthiness of good, and the greatest patience under sufferings of evil; Absolute sovereignty and perfect resignation; total self-sufficiency, and an entire trust and reliance on God. In other words, there was never a man like this: both Lion and Lamb, and there never will be again.³

George Whitefield once preached a sermon to young women that I revisit every year or so. His whole purpose was to show how Christ is the best husband. Nothing can compare to him. Let me quote at length:

Do you desire one that is great? He is of the highest dignity, he is the glory of heaven, the darling of eternity, admired by angels, dreaded by devils, and adored by saints. For you to be espoused to so great a king, what honor will you have by this espousal?

Do you desire one that is rich? None is comparable to Christ, the fullness of the earth belongs to him. If you be espoused to Christ, you shall share in his unsearchable riches; you shall receive of his fullness, even grace for grace here, and you shall hereafter be admitted to glory, and shall live with this Jesus to all eternity.

Do you desire one that is wise? There is none comparable to Christ for wisdom. His knowledge is infinite, and if you are espoused to Christ, he will guide and counsel you, and make you wise unto salvation.

Do you desire one that is good? There is none like unto Christ in this regard; others may have some goodness, but it is imperfect; Christ's goodness is complete and perfect, he is full of goodness and in him dwelleth no evil.

Do you desire one that is beautiful? His eyes are most sparkling, his looks and glances of love are ravishing, his smiles are most delightful and refreshing unto the soul: Christ is the most lovely person of all others in the world.

Do you desire one that can love you? None can love you like Christ: His love, my dear sisters, is incomprehensible; his love passeth all other loves: The love of the Lord Jesus is first, without beginning; his love is free without any motive; his love is great without any measure; his love is constant without any change, and his love is everlasting.⁴

³ Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ”.

⁴ George Whitefield, “Christ The Best Husband”.



Quoting Edwards again: “What is there that you can desire should be in a Savior, that is not in Christ?”. How often do you contemplate his complete worthiness? Friends: there is nowhere else to turn but Jesus for what you desire.

Fall Back On His Covenant (6:1-3)

The bridesmaids are convinced by this magnificent description in 6:1. Now they want to join in on the search. Where can we find this matchless beloved? What they are describing is not jealousy, but awe. They want love this powerful to flourish. But again, their question is a good one. Jesus is worthy, but when we are feeling lukewarm, where can we find him?

The answer of **verses 2-3** should blow us away. The beloved is gone, but is he really? She knows just where to find him: he is in the garden, gathering and grazing among the lilies. Remember who is described as the garden: it's the bride. In chapter 4 we saw how their consummated love and marriage became a flourishing garden. The garden is their marriage, their covenant. She now remembers an amazing truth: no matter how distant he feels, our beloved Jesus Christ is still ours, **verse 3**. Where do we find him when he feels distant? Not in our emotions, not in our desire or lack thereof, but in his covenant with us. Jesus came into the world to live perfectly, to die in our place. He takes our shame and our guilt. His blood was the fertilizer that causes a new covenant to grow, a new kind of relationship. No longer do we have to feel distant from him because of our sin. Because of his death and resurrection, his very heart is open to us. We are his, and he is ours!

Go back to Revelation. Jesus is writing to the church in Laodicea, and what does he say? It's the same language as Song of Songs. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” The security of Christ's covenant means he will never stop knocking and never stop desiring you. He wants his love to consume you, to burn up your timidity and sinful inhibitions. No matter how many times you close the door, you make excuses, you turn away—he will never stop coming after you. That is the power of covenant love: that through his sacrificial death, he sealed the deal. He has made vows to you—and his vow is to continue to love you and beautify you until the very end of days. Where is he? He is close, ready, in the garden of the good news. When you aren't in the mood—remember his steadfastness. Not once will you ever have your desire go unmet. Not once will he make excuses to be with you. *When your heart is cold, remember that his is always warm. Meditate on his matchless worth, and don't let the moment pass you by. Come and eat with him and enjoy his love.*

