

The Song of Songs

Part 5 – The Foundation for Intimacy: 'Dark, but Lovely'

I. The Foundation for Intimacy: God's Love for Us in the Midst of Our Weakness

1:5 Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem,

1. There are two revelations that empower the bride's journey into loving her King: His invitation (1:4), and her own beauty (1:5).
2. Before she can even begin her journey she comes to understand that He has desired her, and she comes to believe that she is able to satisfy that desire, even in the midst of her weakness.
3. We first hear it as a declaration from her own lips directed to the daughters of Jerusalem, in answer to another unspoken question. First it was who is He that you would love Him so? Now it's who are you that He would love you so?
4. Her answer is surprisingly deep given her just budding love: 'Dark am I, yet lovely.' I am as dark as the rest of you, I am weak, and I am broken, but in the midst of that I am my Beloved's and His desire is for me.
5. We first hear it from her lips, but it clearly comes from her having begun to see herself in the way that He sees her. Over and over again, He tells of her beauty (1:9,10,15;2:2,14;4:1-15;6:4-9;7:1-9).
6. There is a place of safety in God's love where we are called to live. It lies between the trap of pride on one side and of a poor self-image on the other. It comes in learning to see ourselves the way God sees us.
7. We first receive God's love for us and return it to Him. Then we are able to love ourselves on the basis of those first two and nothing else – not our accomplishments, our talents, or our reputation.
8. From the safety of God's love for us in weakness we can reach for greatness, knowing His affections are not based on our successes or failures.

Psalm 18:35 Your gentleness has made me great.

II. Dark, but Lovely: Loving God in Our Weakness

1:5 Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

6 Do not stare at [look upon] me because I am dark,
For the sun has burned me.

My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me keeper of the vineyards,
but my own vineyard I have not kept.

1. When she says 'dark am I', it's actually not metaphorical language at all, it's a simple statement of fact. She's talking about being dark-skinned in a Hebrew culture where the desirable trait was to be fair-skinned.

2. We are truly dark – there is no false humility in that statement. It speaks of three separate realities: our commonness in the face of His royalty, the damage the world has done to us and the neglected state of our own hearts.
3. Part of what being dark-skinned reflected is that it she is a commoner – a working class citizen. The rich and the royal lived indoors or in the shade, the commoners labored in the sun. It's her labors in the vineyard that have left her darkened by the sun and not fair-skinned as the King would have been, and as a princess growing up in the palace would have been.
4. There is an inherent darkness to us that is simply due to the fact that He is of an altogether different class than we are – He is the uncreated God, we are His creation. It's a distinction that won't go anywhere, but God has chosen to bridge it by stepping out of His glory to meet us where we are and then lifting us up to dwell with Him in His glory forever.
5. It also spoke of true damage to her beauty done by her years of toil in the sun – the world had taken its toll on her. She was not only separated by class, but even after He chose to overlook that distinction and bring her into His chambers she was thoroughly out of place. She was a dark-skinned maiden in the midst of a fair-skinned world.
6. Likewise, we are thoroughly out of place in the presence of God – sinful creatures in the midst of holiness. Living in the world has taken it's toll on us, introducing all sorts of thoughts and behaviors that have no place in the chambers of the King.
7. Finally, it speaks of her beauty that had been neglected. In all her labors in her brothers' vineyards, her own vineyard (her heart) had been neglected. In Hebrew culture part of the bride's preparations for her wedding day would be to spend a full year staying indoors during the heat of the day so as to become as fair as possible. 'Dark am I' in this sense speaks not of an inherent ugliness, but of a beauty neglected.
8. Part of our darkness is inherent to our status as created beings, and part of it comes from our fallen nature, but part of it also comes from our own hearts having been long neglected prior to being awakened by the voice of our Beloved. We are part of the 'very good' creation of God – created with beauty and love in us. It's been neglected and it's been darkened by sin and the world, but it's still there – and this is what makes us lovely.

III. The Eyes of Love: Seeing as God Sees

4:1 Behold, you are fair, My love!

Behold, you are fair!

7 You are altogether beautiful, My love;
there is no flaw in you.

1. While our darkness is easy to see, our loveliness is sometimes more difficult to see. Never does her Beloved have to remind her that she's dark – she figured that one out for herself (perhaps with some help from the daughters of Jerusalem) – but over and over again He tells her she is lovely.

2. Love is blind, but God is not. When He calls us beautiful it's not because He's not looking. The detailed descriptions of her beauty in 4:2-6, 6:5-7 and 7:1-5 are to let her know that He's not just *saying* she's beautiful – He's looked, and He is deeply familiar with her beauty. He has examined her from head to toe, He's seen everything – every slightest feature, even the most intimate, hidden parts – and His determination is 'You are altogether beautiful, My love; there is no flaw in you.'
3. David marvels at how well God knows him, having seen every moment of his life and every thought of his heart.
Psalm 139:1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. 5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.
4. God doesn't have to close His eyes to call us beautiful. He looks at us and He actually sees beauty in the midst of our darkness.
5. How can He do that? Because He sees differently than we do. He sees the end from the beginning, He calls what is not as though it were.
Isaiah 46:9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done
Romans 4:17 God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;
6. From the very beginning her Beloved prophesies over her that she has dove's eyes – a locked gaze of devotion. Time after time though that gaze falters He prophesies it again, and eventually He begins to receive it.
1:15 Behold you are fair, My love!
Behold you are fair!
You have dove's eyes.
7. God has a habit of speaking over people beauty and strength that does not yet exist, and then bringing it about. Jesus calls Peter a 'rock', shortly before rebuking him as a stumbling stone, followed by Peter's denying Him three times leading up to His crucifixion.
Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
8. God looks at us and sees that for which He made us. He created us as a marvelous work, able to satisfy His heart's desire. And He sees the end – the restoration of that good creation.
Psalm 139:13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.

9. When we understand that God sees us differently than we see ourselves – that He sees us completely and yet loves us completely – we react differently in our times of weakness. We run to Him and not from Him. We actually desire His eye to be on us as David did. We want to know what He thinks of us.

Psalms 139:17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; **24** And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

10. And that's exactly what God desires for us. Nothing pains Him more than when we hide. Sin's most disastrous effect on us was causing us to hide from God. Jesus came to remove that condemnation.

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked... **8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus

11. God is not only *able* to look on us in our weakness and call forth beauty in us, He *longs* to.

2:14 O My dove, in the clefts of the rock,

In the secret places of the cliff,

Let Me see your face,

Let Me hear your voice;

For your voice is sweet,

And your face is lovely.

IV. Now to Him Who is Able

1. God sees beauty in us, not based on the strength of our love for Him, but on the strength of His love for us and His ability to bring us forth in love.
2. Jesus' confidence in calling Peter a rock was not based on Peter's own faithfulness but on Jesus' intercession for Him.
Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."
3. When we choose to love God, He is able to bring us forth in beauty.
Psalms 37:3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. **4** Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. **5** Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. **6** He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.
4. God makes us beautiful, and then He is ravished by our beauty.
Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. **11** For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

62:1 For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns. 2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, And all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will name. 3 You shall also be a crown of glory In the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem In the hand of your God. 4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the LORD delights in you, And your land shall be married. 5 For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.

5. God is able to be touched by a love that He has given. He is moved by a beauty that He created.

1:13 My Beloved is to me a satchet of myrrh that lies all night [resting, it lodgeth] between my breasts.
 14 My Beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi.
4:10 How much better than wine is your love,
 And the fragrance of your perfumes
 Than all spices!

V. The Impact of Weak Love

4:9 You have ravished My heart,
 My sister, My bride;
 You have ravished My heart
 With one glance of your eyes,
 With one jewel of your necklace.
 10 How fair is your love, My sister, My bride!
 How much better than wine is your love,
 And the fragrance of your perfumes
 Than all spices!
 11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, My bride;
 milk and honey are under your tongue.
 The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

1. God enjoys us in our weakness. When we give God our attention, we discover that we have His attention. He sees it all. He is the God who sees what is done in secret – every little movement of our heart, and He enjoys it.
2. God is able to see dove's eyes in one glance from our eyes. He is able to see the fullness that is yet to come without enjoying the weak love of the moment any less because of it. We can love God wholeheartedly now regardless of our failures to do so in the past and regardless of our likelihood to succeed at it in the future.
3. In every glance, God sees wholehearted love, He sees the fullness of our heart becoming His. Dove's eyes are made up of glances, and wholeheartedness is made up of choices for God.

4:12 A garden enclosed is My sister, My bride,
 a spring locked, a fountain sealed.
 13 Your plants are a paradise of pomegranates
 With precious fruits... and all the finest spices.

4. Knowing God's love for us in the midst of our weakness empowers us to say yes to love. And God receives a weak 'yes' as a 'yes', no questions asked, no disclaimers required, even when we don't fully know what we're saying.

4:16 Awake, O north wind,
And come, O south!
Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow out.
Let my Beloved come into His garden
And eat its pleasant fruits.

5. Anyone who says yes to God is a new creation. Our darkness may still cling to us, but our identity has fundamentally changed. We are no longer a sinner who struggles to love God. We are a lover of God who struggles with sin.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

6. Jesus reinstated Peter not only into His good graces, but into the destiny and honor that He had intended for him based on one simple declaration: Lord, You know I love you.

John 21:15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

VI. The Progressive Work of Love

1. Love begins with receiving God's love for us – beginning to see ourselves the way He sees us.
2. It's in receiving God's love for us that we are able to love Him in return, realizing that it matters – it has eternal consequence. He sees it and He receives it, and it moves His heart.
3. Then we are able to love ourselves on the basis of those first two and nothing else – not our accomplishments, our talents, or our reputation.
4. It's from that place that we are able to fulfill the second commandment – to love our neighbors as ourselves. Loving ourselves rightly is the key to learning to love others rightly.
5. We love ourselves because we are loved by God and we are lovers of God – because Jesus loves me and so I am inherently worthy of self-respect and because my love for Him is real and significant in His eyes and so I am inherently worth investing in.
6. We love others for the same reason – because regardless of whether they're returning it or not, God loves them and so they must be treated with respect. And because they are capable of returning that love and giving Jesus His inheritance and so love compels us to encourage and build one another up towards that end.
7. There is no better way to invest our time, money, energy and emotions than in growing love for Jesus – it's a guaranteed winner. There is going to be a wedding, and His bride will be ready.