

## **THE CONSUMATION OF THE DIVINE ROMANCE IN CHAPTER 8 OF THE SONG OF SONGS**

The Bible begins by showing us who our God is. He is Elohim. In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and earth. He is the Mighty One. He is the God who is Plural-in-Unity and One-in-Plurality. He is the Triune God. He is the Mighty One, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Next, we see in Genesis chapter two, He is revealed as Jehovah. He is that He is. He is self-existing and ever existing. This One is the God of man. He wants to be Jehovah to man. He does not only want to be Elohim, the powerful Creator. He wants to be Jehovah, man's I AM. He wants to be everything to man. Man is small, and man is fragile. But Jehovah is more than the Almighty God; He is the All-sufficient One. He covers all time—past, present, and future. And He covers all needs. He is everything that man would ever need. Man is only the clay. Jehovah is the potter. He has a plan. He has wisdom. He is the supplier, and He is the supply. He is everything to the man of clay that He raised up with His own breath.

Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. Chapter 40 is a new beginning in the book, and it represents the New Testament. It begins with a few verses of preparation. These verses reveal that the way Israel, the nations, and the whole world will be restored, begins by just a voice, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Humanity had become a barren, thorny, and worthless wilderness. This wilderness was not a place that God could use unless it was dealt with. So, John the baptizer came to deal with that wilderness. He preached a message of repentance. Everything high has to be brought down. Surely that refers to man's high-mindedness and pride, just like the original sin of Satan. The first thing that has to be brought down is man's pride. His pride is because he trusts in himself and exalts himself and boasts in himself.

To the Corinthians, Paul had to speak so strongly, He challenged them asking them, "What do you have except what you have received? Consider your calling, brothers. Not many wise, not many powerful, not many noble are called. But God called the things which are nothing, to put to shame those who think they are something, so that no flesh would boast in His presence." He told the Ephesians, "You are saved by grace, and that is not of yourselves, not of your works. It is the gift of God, lest any man should boast." God has to bring down our self-capacity, our self-ability, until we realize we are nothing. We really are nothing. The low places need to be raised up to level. The crooked places need to be straightened. We are the crooked places. We're all crooked. We're all liars. In Romans Paul says "all men are liars." There's something crooked about every one of us. Some are crooked more subtly and

hiddenly. Others are crooked more outwardly and visibly. All the crookedness has to be straightened. All the rough places need to be made smooth. Then there will be a highway in the desert where our God can come on, and then all flesh shall see His glory. So, the voice crying out in the wilderness has to prepare a people until God has a way.

These first few verses deal with the wrong things that have to be made right. But the rest of the chapter isn't dealing with *wrong* things. It's dealing with *strong* things. It reveals that our God is the eternal God. He surpasses time. Our God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. Our God does not tire. He can create a billion galaxies and He's not tired at all. His power is unimaginable. And His thoughts are not comprehensible. His understanding equals His power. And He is great. All the nations would be a drop in the bucket for Him. All the forests of the earth would not have enough wood to kindle a fire on which all the beasts on the earth could be offered to Him. His greatness is off the scale. And yet, His heart and His economy is focused on a little creature called man. And man has to learn that it is Jehovah, it is Jehovah alone, who can accomplish His New Testament economy.

In Isaiah chapter 40 it speaks of "young men." Young men represent man at his best, with his strength, and with his power. Psalms 147 says, Jehovah takes no delight in the strength of horses; nor pleasure in the legs of a man." Oh, our legs are so powerful, but they don't match the legs of a horse. Horses can run, they can jump, and they are powerful. However, the Lord doesn't delight in the legs of a man. They represent all our strength, our greatest strength. With our legs we can leap, jump, and run. We think we're pretty powerful, but we're no match for the legs of a horse. They can really run. They are beautiful. They are elegant. They are massive. They are powerful and agile. The Lord wants us to realize that even in man's youth, even at his best point in life and his strongest point in life, he is nothing. Some can run—but they will get tired. It won't take too long and they will tire. Others are weaker, but they can still walk. They also have some strength. It's a slower kind of strength. It's not so flashy, but it is steady. Nevertheless, it will faint also. It is human. It is human strength. Perhaps it is the flesh in a more refined way, or a more mature way. But it is still the flesh, and all flesh will be exposed because it can't go very far.

There is another way, and that is the way that God wants man to take. In God's New Testament economy, His way is not to use man's powerful legs that can run, or even patient legs that can walk. His way is soaring. Those that wait upon Jehovah - wait until you cannot move. Wait until you cannot run. Wait until you cannot even walk. Stop yourself. Terminate yourself and allow the Lord to come in. Allow the Lord to be the Mighty One, to be the I AM, to be your everything. Like stanza 2 of hymn 477 says,

“Oh man, go out, and God will come in; Be not, and He will be.” It seems this is the one lesson we have to learn in the New Testament - that we must stop ourselves and wait upon Jehovah and receive His infusion and receive His supply. When He supplies, that is resurrection life. When we are not, and He is, that is the resurrection life. Then we will mount up with wings like an eagle. There will be power, but it will not be leg power. It will not be natural power. It will not be horse power. It will be resurrection power, a power that will enable us to do what men are incapable of doing. It will allow us to be what we are incapable of being. The resurrection power will enable us to soar like an eagle, far above the world, and above the situations that would keep us down, but only if we will wait upon the Lord and not exercise our natural strength. This is the lesson we must learn over and over again.

Moses had to learn the lesson of the burning thorn bush. The bush is nothing, but the fire is divine. It was God's way to say, “Moses, you can't do it. You could not liberate even one Israelite from Egypt. The only one who got out, was you. You are totally incapable. Your mind, your intelligence, your training, your capacity, your strength, all mean nothing in God's plan. It is when you are weak and old and useless in yourself and have become worthless in the sight of the world, then you are ready to be called. You are ready for God to use you. When you are nothing, then Jehovah can be the fire within you. This fire is not natural. This fire is divine; this fire is holy and everything that touches it will be holy. Moses, do not trust in yourself.”

Israel was rebuked many times for trusting in themselves. Second Chronicles chapter 16 verse 9 says that the one that has a perfect heart is the one to whom Jehovah will show Himself powerful. If you look in the context of that chapter, the perfect heart is the one that trusts in Jehovah, that leans on Jehovah to fight the battles to overcome the enemy. In Proverbs 3 it says, Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding and He will make your paths straight. It seems that we always want to trust in ourselves. Although we are clay, although we are a thorn bush and nothing more, we trust in our legs, we trust in our strength, we trust in our intelligence, and we do not trust in Jehovah. We have to learn to lean upon Him and trust in Him.

And this is the story that we are told over and over again in the New Testament. In John 15 Jesus said, “I am the true vine. You are the branches. Without me, you can do nothing. Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.” And this is developed by Paul. He said in Galatians chapter 2, “I am crucified with Christ.” I am crucified with Christ. That means I am not. I cannot. I have not. I am nothing. I am a crucified one. It is no longer I that live. It is Christ that lives in me. He is the power. He is the energy. He is the source. Not I, but Christ. But, as it says in second Corinthians chapter 4, “We

have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power might not be out of ourselves.” It's as though Paul is saying that God definitely does not want the power to come from us. He wants it to come from the resurrection life, from the treasure within us, so that the face of Jesus Christ, who is the glory of the invisible God, would be seen in us. This is the theme, and this is the way that God has shown, and that the way that we must take. This is the way of the cross.

This was the experience of brother Watchman Nee. He spent six years having been put out, or perhaps he withdrew from continuing his ministry. I don't know all the details. But he was out, and he became nothing, although he had been so much used by God, and was given so much revelation, and was so respected - even in Europe, because he had such a capacity. Before that happened, he saw something more; he saw the Body. He saw the Body of Christ as an organic reality. But when he tried to minister it, as they say, all hell broke loose. And the worst storm that they had ever experienced among the churches took place. He was slandered, rejected and opposed. The very ones he had established as elders cast him aside. He spent six long years in the wilderness. When he was asked by one brother, “When will you resume your ministry?” He said, “Never.” In his mind, it was all over. So, he stayed in that condition for six years. But he wasn't the first one to experience that.

Sister Margaret Barber experienced that also. While she was serving in China as a young missionary she was falsely accused by some jealous missionaries. For that reason, she returned to England. There she spent the next six years in a kind of accused, falsely accused, and shameful position. But she bore the cross. She did not open her mouth. She was like a lamb before the shearers. She was silent. She bore that shame and humility for six years until one day she was required by her superior to tell him the truth of the accusations against her. It was only then, when in God's time the false rumors were dispelled, she went back to China. It was at this time under God's sovereignty, that she met Watchman Nee, who was only a young man around twenty years of age. Little did she imagine that this young man would play a special role in carrying out God's purpose on the earth. Those six years of silence, of obedience, of humility, of breaking, put into her a fire that could not be quenched; they put into her the wings of an eagle. Because of her profound experiences with the Lord, she had the wherewithal to perfect that young man and bring him to the cross and bring him to God Himself to know the resurrection life. And then - almost 30 years later, that young man, Watchman Nee, went through the same kind of trial: excommunicated, cast aside, rejected, maligned, and become nothing to most people. He stayed on the cross. He “waited on Jehovah.” He denied himself, and in God's time, after six years he also was exonerated and raised up again. This is the

same story as with Joseph in Egypt. Like Joseph, if we are to be used by God one day, we have to spend a long time in prison. And when God's work has been finished in your life, He will release you from prison to reign for Him as a life-giver to a world in famine.

So, this is our lesson and this is the lesson of the Bride. She comes up "out of the wilderness" in chapter 8 of Song of Songs. The question is asked, "Who is this that comes up out of the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?" Leaning on her Beloved - this is the one characteristic of the Shulamite in her maturity as she is waiting for her rapture, as she awaits her Lord's return. She is "leaning" on her beloved. This is how she is coming up out of the wilderness of the world and the flesh. She no longer trusts in her own strength. Actually, by this time, she has no strength of her own. It's gone. "For me to live is Christ." Christ is now her person. Christ is now her strength. She leans on Christ. He is the one bringing her up out of that second wilderness. She began as a mare, as a powerful horse, but when she is transformed, and when God's work is consummated in her, she is a very weak person in herself. She no longer trusts in her own strength, if she has any left. Her only desire is to lean on her Beloved. Oh, that is always so comfortable, for He is so trustworthy. He will not fail you. Lean on Him, then step by step, step by step, step by step, come up out of the wilderness of the flesh and this physical world around us. That's how Enoch walked with God. For 300 years, he walked with God step by step. We also need to learn to walk with God, to stop ourselves, to stop the flesh, to stop the natural life, and to let the life of Christ in resurrection live in us, walk in us, and move through us.

We're not people sitting around in wheelchairs waiting for Christ's return, necessarily. We're like the Shulamite who still had a lot of work to do. She had many little sisters that were undeveloped in their faith and love. She feels a deep responsibility to perfect them. She wants to supply them. She wants to build upon them with the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ. She wants to minister life to them so that they may grow and mature and be ready for the day when she is spoken for, perhaps to be called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. She's concerned for them, as also is her beloved. She says, "we" have a little sister. Whatever she does now is mutual; she is speaking for both herself and for her Beloved. It is as though she is saying "We" have this kind of situation, we have a little sister that is immature, who is not ready for the wedding. We need to love our sisters, build up our sisters, strengthen our sisters, beautify our sisters, so that they could be a wall to express God and stop the work of the enemy. So that they could be a door, a door through whom the Triune God can come forth, a door through whom many will be able to enter into the kingdom of God.

Also, even at the end of her journey, there is still mention made of “Solomon's vineyards.” There's still much work to do. We have much work to do. We want our King to be satisfied. We want our King to have much fruit in His many fields, His many vineyards. We will labor with him faithfully and we will joyfully and righteously give to him according to what he has entrusted to us. So, there's much work to do all the way to the end. She will labor with him; she will labor *with* him, not only *for* him. She will bear fruit with him and for him, but now her labor is not in her own strength. And she will be kept in such a place.

Now she deeply realizes that she is only a sinner, saved by grace. This is how it all began. God called her. She was raised up under the protecting shade and the nourishing supply of the apple tree. That means she began when God's grace reached her. Under the covering of His grace she was enlightened, she was convinced of her sins and repented. She was born again. She was brought forth and regenerated. The grace of God caused us to repent, to see that we are nothing more than a sinner saved by grace. This grace began our Christian life and that same grace will bring us all the way to the end. This grace will supply us, will strengthen us, will keep us, and is the very power that will bring us up out of the wilderness to be raptured. This strength and power is not of ourselves, it is of Christ who lives in us. As hymn number 312 says, “All sufficient grace! Never powerless! It is Christ who lives in me.” Only this grace, only this indwelling Christ, can bring a saved and transformed sinner out of the wilderness of the flesh and of this physical world.

We need to learn this, deeply. She did, so she prayed, “Set me on your heart as a seal,” the source of your love. “Set me on your arm as a seal,” the source of your strength. “Only your love and only your power can keep me all the way to the end. I began as a sinner saved by grace, but only the strength of your grace, and the love of your heart, can keep me all the way to the end. Love me powerfully, Lord! Love me as strong as death which overpowers all who enter in, and as Sheol, be jealous for me. As Sheol will not let one of its victims leave, be jealous over me so that not one thing of my natural life and not one thing of my fallen, sinful person will take me away from you. Lord, set me as a seal upon your heart and as a seal upon your arm. Your jealousy is as cruel as Sheol, it has the flashings of fire. Consume everything in me that is not fit for the wedding feast with You. Lord, as I wait for your return, let me hear Your voice. As we labor together in your vineyards by the resurrection life and by the strength and power of your grace, let me hear Your voice. Speak to me, Lord, every day. Let us be in a sweet communion and fellowship all our days, all our days.”

*“I will be with you, all the days. I will be with you. I will work together with you. I will be beside you. I will be with you in the vineyard. You're not in the vineyard alone.”*

As we wait for our Beloved to come, we are groaning because of our flesh. We're leaning on Him because of our weakness. And we're listening for His voice, for His voice is our only leading, our only direction. "Lord, we need you; we need you all the way to the end."

*"I will be with you, and I will work within you in the vineyards. Together we will carry out that great commission that I entrusted to you. I will be with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age."*

And when You come back, You will come back on mountains of spices. You will come back as a hart, as a roe, strong in the power of Your resurrection. And You will come back on the mountains of Your kingdom, Your eternal kingdom, Your sweet kingdom. It is the kingdom that emanates the fragrance of Your victorious resurrection life that has worked in us to prepare us to be your bride, your companion and your coworker in the delightful, aromatic, kingdom of Your love. Amen.