

While the Bridegroom is Away

Contributed by billraul

I. the age of longing for Jesus

A. What Response is Jesus looking for in Between the Two Advents?

And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Mt. 9:15)

1. Jesus described a day that He would be taken from us, the Bridegroom would be taken away and in His delay the friends of the Bridegroom would mourn for Him…would long and ache and groan for His return. Jesus predicted what would seem normal in those days for those who love and miss the Bridegroom.

2. Here we are, in the thick of the great delay, with the signs of the times pounding upon our door and the churning of nations along with the surging of evil seduction raging all around. In the wake of so troubling a timeframe, the jealous eyes of the enthroned Bridegroom search for something in the hearts of His friends—the heart of longing and mourning for Him. He will not return within a vacuum. He will not return without that groan.

B. Our Role to Play

1. We live in between the two times of His first and second comings and the Bridegroom to whom we are betrothed is absent. Our role to play in our day is not ambiguous or uncertain but very clear and evident—the eyes of Jesus are searching for friends who love Him so deeply that they do more than just ascribe faith in Him, they actually live their days in an incessant longing for Him and for His Return.

2. The Bridegroom left on a journey just before the wedding, and the Bride cannot act as if things are normal. If she loves Him, she will ache for His return. [1]

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. (Ps. 73:25)

3. Though our minds know it and our mouths may give testimony to it, our hearts have far to catch up to the groan that matches the time we are in. And this is where fasting and mourning come upon the scene with such urgent necessity. We fast to remind our hearts that He is been taken away, for we have grown used to His absence. The fastings give way to mournings and in mourning we enter the holy cry of "Come" that all of scripture presses to leave in our hearts.

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!"… "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev. 22:17, 20)

II. He came to invoke our passion and longing for him

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us… (1 Jn. 1:1)

A. Tenderizing our hearts as a Babe in a Manger

1. The Baby in the manger has much to speak to lowly hearts, much to convey to hungry souls and any who will heed tiny a voice. The One we thought too far and too distant, too aloof and too indifferent to be known now lies before us as Baby so accessible. The One who created all things is now here so close and approachable, having come to us in the form of a weak and vulnerable baby. As we worship and adore Him there, we see the glory of God revealed in His face. In this tiny frame and poor form, He tells us mysteries so personal about His humility and meekness, His tenderness and mercy. When we gaze upon Immanuel in the manger, our hearts become assured of God's unchanging love…His tenderness toward us…and His constant receiving of our love.

2. Many scenes in the life of Jesus arrest the imagination but few as forcefully as the nativity of our Lord. To the redeemed soul the picture of Joseph and his betrothed huddled in a cave with a crying newborn becomes overwhelming. Their mean and lowly estate is seen as grand, their weakness incites trembling. Pressed to its bounds, the mind at last surrenders to the enormity of its beauty. While words may compel one to kneel beside the manger in adoration, only speechless love may pick up the Babe and feel the immeasurable weight of His tiny frame.[2]

B. Convincing us of His Kindness by His Compassion

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Mt. 9:36)

1. Jesus did nothing to shield Himself from the profuse rejection He received from men. In His sinlessness—free from pride and arrogance—He lacked the "self-centered" means found in the proud heart that so readily protects itself. The nature of compassion—the quality most attributed to Jesus—stands in direct opposition to the nature of pride.

2. Only arrogance can forge walls and instigate "safe distances" from fellow human hearts. Only pride knows how to offer indifference and coldness to another. But Love knows no such response. Love bears all things and embraces every person in its path.

3. Every cry of every child pierces His heart. The affliction of the afflicted wounds Him deeply. Even the faintest prayer of our weak hearts do not escape Him in impact. Never could we rightly accuse Him of indifference for Love can never be such but is always concerned, always compassionate, always open and vulnerable—even at high risk and great cost. If He could be deaf to such prayers or be hardened to such cries, He would invalidate and make void His own law of love—He would compromise His very own nature.

C. Defeating our Accusers and Gripping our Hearts in Love by the Passion of His Cross

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:8)

1. I find no greater meditation, no safer place to set the eyes of my heart upon than beneath the shadow of those sacr

wooden beams, there gazing up upon the broken body of the One who was Himself God in the flesh—the only One that ever truly loved me. Every drop of blood that there drips down declares a deafening song of Love untold—how high, how wide, how deep, how long is the love of God. Every glance into the most marred holy Face wrenches my heart into a heaving of at last believing that it is true, all is true—oh my God it is true. No shadow of darkness prevails here. No arrogant accusation touches me in this place. No persuasive sneer dares a single word. Here hovering in the most holy silhouette of all time I am kept most safe and I can finally agree with Paul's words so bold:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus—If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?...Who shall separate us for the love of Christ?... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:1, 31 — 32, 35, 38)

2. "Great thief of hearts, the strength of your love has broken even our hard hearts. You inflamed the whole world with your love. Wisest Lord, inebriate our hearts with this wine, burn them with this fire, pierce them with this arrow of your love. This, your cross, is indeed a crossbow that pierces hearts. Let the whole world know that my heart is stricken. Sweetest love, what have you done? You have come to heal me, and you have wounded me. You have come to teach me, and you have made me like someone mad. O wisest madness, may I never live without you. Lord, everything that I see on the cross invites me to love: the wood, the form, the wounds in your body; and above all, your love invites me to love you and never forget you." [3]

III. Our pilgrimage of passion

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul— (1 Pet. 2:11) Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said..Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh—But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. (Lk. 6:20-25)

A. Embracing Longing for Jesus

1. For all those who love Jesus, it is a time to mourn. Why? As simply put as He Himself put it, because He is not here (Matt. 9:15). Because He has been taken from us. Anyone who has tasted of this Man Jesus, has touched upon the beauty of His person and the glory revealed in His every word and action, becomes ruined by an incurable wound of longing that demands nothing less than His return.

2. In this age, we are as pilgrims and strangers and the posture of heart to fit such a description is one of longing and aching, mourning for the day when we will see our Jesus face to face.

3. Just as it was for the apostles, this longing for Him only flows out of knowing Him. It is when we come into the sphere of His own self-revelation that our hearts are apprehended in love. You cannot know Him and not profoundly miss Him when He is away.

4. Longing is a gift imparted by the Lord to us. Though it is painful and often difficult to bear, it is not to be pacified or forsaken. How often as the seasons pass, so too do the initial longings get left behind and the first aching become forsaken. We grow weary with their weight and over time appease the groan rather than remaining in the ache. Yet this is not the way the Lord would have it.

5. I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain—O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. [4]

B. A Desire in Fellowship

1. The One who prayed, "Father, I desire that they may be with Me where I am—"; has yet to receive His full inheritance (Jn. 17:24). He desires fellowship in this longing and considers it a sign of friendship with Himself (Matt. 9:15).

2. We do not long for God in isolation. We long in response to His own longing. We long in agreement with His own fervent desire that we would be with Him where He is, beholding His glory and gazing upon His beauty (Jn. 17:24).

3. Our desire for God is but an echo and participation in His own desire. We desire God because He first desired us. We long because He longs. When we enter into our inheritance of this desiring God, we are participating in His eternal desire.

4. Jesus did not cease to long for the consummation of all things, for the day when He would come again and receive to Himself, the day when we would finally be with Him where He is, beholding His glory (Jn. 14:3, 17:24). The Bridegroom still remains, awaiting with anticipation and desire the coming Day. He urges us to join Him in fellowship and sharing in this yearning.

5. But none honours God like the thirst of desire, Nor possesses the heart so completely with Him; For it burns the world out with the swift ease of fire, And fills life with good works till it runs o'er the brim. Then pray for desire, for love's wistfullest yearning, for the beautiful pining of holy desire—For the lack of desire is the ill of all ills; Many thousands through it the dark pathway have trod—Oh then wish more for God, burn more with desire, Covet more the dear sight of His marvelous Face; Pray louder, pray longer, for the sweet gift of fire to come down on thy heart with its whirlwinds of grace—God loves to be longed for, He loves to be sought, For He sought us Himself with such longing and love: He died for desire of us, marvelous thought! And He yearns for us now to be with Him above.[5]

6. "—when we meet His eyes, perceive the eternal longing that He even now possesses and hear His voice like

steady stream praying continually before the Father, “Father, I desire…Father, I desire…Father, I desire, that they would be with Me where I am…” that we take up again the weight of this mourning, we joy again in allowing longing for Jesus to possess us wholly and passion for Him to grip us without reserve. Until the day when the Bridegroom returns, the day we finally see Him face to face, we love Him with our unrelenting longing and mourning.

Information provided by:
IHOP.org

[1] John Piper, A Hunger for God, (Crossway Books, 1997), p 86

[2] Stephen Venable, Life of Christ in the Gospels: Session 04 (2008), p 20.

[3] St. Alphonsus Liguori, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, (Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1997), p 9

[4] AW Tozer, The Pursuit of God, (Christian Publications, Inc.:1948), p 18, 20

[5]Desire of God, Frederick W. Faber(1814-1863)