



Behold the Bride, the wife of the Lamb

Recently, a friend of mine began to paint on pieces of wood and as one painting progressed, the Lord began to speak to me from the brush strokes. We hear much about the Bride of Christ, but who is she, where is she? How does one recognise her? One sees so much mixture in the church today and it is difficult to identify who is truly of the seed of Christ and who is not. Even the world looks at the church and sees so much of itself, that it sees little reason to lay hold of that which the church in general is advertising. There is a lot of talk without a corresponding walk on the highway of holiness. Few born into the church in this present generation have even seen what true holiness looks like. As I looked as that plank of wood and the first brush strokes being laid on its surface, the Spirit reminded me of the scripture:

1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

'Made manifest' means 'brought into the light, brought out of hiddenness'. What day will bring this revealing? The Bible speaks of a day that is coming that burns like an oven when what has been built by the church shall be tried and tested by fire. Jesus Himself said everyone shall be salted with fire. At present the church looks much like the raw plank of wood. The veil of what is wood, hay and stubble is covering the true

Bride of Christ. She is hidden amongst the mixture of 21st century Christianity but as the Spirit of Burning applies fire with His expert brush strokes, a separation begins to happen. What is truly of gold, silver and precious stones begins to emerge and become clearer to the observing world. God will reveal His Bride to the whole of creation which is groaning and looking for light in an increasingly dark atmosphere. She will emerge to truly be the light of the world once again, a city set upon a hill, mount Zion, where the church of the First-Born gather.

Son 3:6 Who or what is this [she asked] that comes gliding out of the wilderness like stately pillars of smoke perfumed with myrrh, frankincense, and all the fragrant powders of the merchant?

Even now, glimpses of the true Betrothed of the Lamb of God are being seen, just as the first panel of the painting above depicts. The features are not clear just yet, but as God shakes everything that can be shaken, the true Bride of Christ arises out of the wood, hay and stubble of what man has built to obscure the foundation of Christ. Her beautiful face comes into focus. She is not just any woman ~ she is arrayed as a Bride for her Husband and she doesn't clothe herself in the latest fashion trends from Paris. She has chosen the good old paths, the garments Heaven has designed for her - white linen; ageless, timeless class and style, worn by generations of the faithful before her as they walked the fiery path to the wedding chamber. She has been prepared by heaven, not earth.

Around her neck are pearls, formed from the tears she has shed at the altar of God as she has surrendered all, a willing living sacrifice, and been willing to drink the cup of the Bridegroom and be counted as His alone. Her eyes look beyond the earthly to the heavenly as she seeks only the face of Him Who paid the bridal price for her with His own blood. She is willing to follow the Lamb wherever He goes; willing to leave her people and her father's house, for the King who desires her beauty (psalm 45).

As the shakings continue, only that which is unshakable will stand amongst the rubble and ashes of the wood, hay and stubble of the doctrines of man and all which has been brought forth from intimacy with the world. The Bride of Christ will be seen clearly and completely distinct from all that has previously veiled her. Until now, she was hidden in plain sight but as Malachi so clearly describes, those who fear the Lord, shall become plainly visible to any who care to look for them.

Mal 3:17 And they shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, in that day when I publicly recognize and openly declare them to be My jewels (My special possession, My peculiar treasure). And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then shall you look back and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who does not serve Him.

Many years ago, in the hallways of Babylon, Daniel and his friends made a choice not to bow their knee in idolatry. Before that, they had just been servants of the king of

Babylon, working in his employ amongst a drove of other servants from many conquered nations; given names he chose for them to obscure their God-given identities. Then the day came when they were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow the knee - and only the ropes holding them were burned. All who gazed upon them, as they emerged unscathed from those flames, acknowledged that they served the supreme God and had walked with Him in the fire.

Son 3:11 Go forth, O you daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon wearing the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of his gladness of heart.

King Solomon is a type of the Bridegroom and the virtuous wife is the crown of her husband so here in Song of Songs, we see all gazing upon this beautiful Bride of Christ which has been given to the Bridegroom. We see the glimpses now of this Bride in stories that are being brought to us about the church in Iraq, living in tents and shining with the glory of God. We see it in the teenager in the west who is determined to remain pure before marriage in a culture within the church where premarital sex is considered acceptable. We see the Bride who is making herself ready in the chaplain who is prepared to lose his job rather than be silenced concerning the truth of what is evil and what is good in God's sight. Look closely at the church in Nepal, surrounded by the rubble of buildings made by man and recently levelled by great shakings and discern the emerging beauty of the Bride. Gaze upon the persecuted church in Nigeria who have lost everything for the sake of Christ and know you look upon His set-apart people, holy unto Him. Every culture, every nation, every tribe and tongue will contribute to the beauty of this Bride who emerges unshaken and clothed in the glory of God from the ashes and the chaff of the systems of this world around her.

'And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.' Zech 13:9

In Song of Songs, the Bride proclaims, "My beloved is mine and I am his". Is this not the same as what the Lord says in Zechariah 13:9 - "you are Mine" and the people answer, "You are my God". In these phrases are the echoes of the vows between a bride and groom. As the Bride makes that journey to complete oneness, the fulfilment of the wedding ceremony, each step takes her further and further out of the systems of this world which have cloaked and hidden her. God is busy separating the precious from the vile and the gold and silver from the wood, hay and stubble. To do this, He comes as a Refiner's fire. Only those who can dwell with the everlasting burnings will see Him face to face:

Isa 33:10 'Now will I arise, says the Lord. Now will I lift up Myself; now will I be exalted. You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that consumes you. And the people will be burned as if to lime, like thorns cut down that are burned in the fire. Hear, you who are far off [says the Lord], what I have done; and you

*who are near, acknowledge My might! The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling seizes the godless ones. [They cry] **Who among us can dwell with that devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with those everlasting burnings?** He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises gain from fraud and from oppression, who shakes his hand free from the taking of bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes to avoid looking upon evil. [Such a man] will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; water for him will be sure. Your eyes will see the King in His beauty'*

In China, India and the Middle East, the trying by fire is more advanced but the western Church's day of being salted with fire is rapidly snowballing. At present, only those with discernment can see the first glimpses of the face of the real Bride of Christ...but soon, even the world will stand and acknowledge those who are arrayed as a Bride adorned for her Husband. God intends to make manifest the counsels of men's hearts and then we will look and clearly discern him who serves God and him who does not. Even as the beauty of a new day is unveiled by the retreating of the darkness of night, so too will this Bride of Christ emerge out of the wilderness of preparation and be brought into sight. Hear the words of the Bridegroom as He gazes at her with His eyes of fire:

Son 6:9 'But my dove, my undefiled and perfect one, stands alone [above them all]; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed and happy, yes, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Son 6:10 [The ladies asked] Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, clear and pure as the sun, and terrible as a bannered host?

Selah