

Rev Kenny Ferguson - Song of Solomon 8

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Well, let us now turn to the song of Solomon on chapter 8. We focus in particular on the words we have in verse 5.

Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

These words in particular. Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

We find many references in the scriptures to King Solomon. And it says in 1 Kings chapter 4 and verses 32 and following that he spoke 3,000 Proverbs and his songs were 1,005.

He spoke of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts and of birds and of reptiles and of fish.

[1 : 21] And all people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and from all the kings of the earth who had heard his wisdom.

It says here that he wrote 3,000 Proverbs and his songs were 1,005. And we have read here from the song of Solomon as if he is highlighting this particular song above all of the rest that is written. This is the song of all the songs that he has written. And the reason that it's singled out as the song of Solomon is the subject upon which he is writing.

He is writing on the grandest and most noble of all subjects. That is Christ and his love for the church and the love of the church for him.

That is the best of all songs. The most sweet of all music is the music of love. Christ's love for his people and their love for him.

[2 : 49] And we see throughout the song at three points this kind of question asked. Who is this? For example, if you go back to chapter 3 at verse 6, you find the same question asked.

What is that? Or who is that? Coming up from the wilderness, like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense with all the fragrant powders of the merchant.

It's as if whoever it is coming up from the wilderness grabs the attention because whoever it is, it's like columns of smoke and full of the costliest perfumes.

And that's a reference to the Church of Christ. It's as if she stands out from the rest of society. She stands out as fragrant and significant against the barrenness of the wilderness of the world.

And then you also see in chapter 6 at verse 10 the same kind of question asked. Who is this? Who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners.

[4 : 20] Another reference to Christ's Church. She stands forth as a light-sum and beautiful and bright object in this dark world.

And then in chapter 8, who is that? Coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved. So each of these questions highlights the significance and the beautiful character of the Church of Christ, of the Christian individual.

And I'd like to focus for a few minutes on what we have in chapter 8 here at verse 5. Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

The beloved of Christ is the Church of Christ, individual Christians. And under three headings, I'd like to say a few words. First of all, her location.

Where is the Church of Christ as we see her in this verse? Well, it says that she is coming up from the wilderness, a wilderness experience.

[5 : 42] Secondly, where is she going? The direction of her travel. It says that she is coming up from the wilderness. And thirdly, how is she walking? What posture does she have?

Well, it says that she is coming up from the wilderness, leaning, reclining upon her beloved. These three points. First of all, her present location. Where is she? Well, it says that she is in a wilderness.

John Bunyan, as he opens that marvellous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he uses this phrase, the wilderness of this world, as I was journeying through the wilderness of this world.

And that's exactly what we have here. A reference to the Christian in the world. In the world. And the world is likened to a wilderness for the Christian, for the people of God.

If you were to look in Deuteronomy chapter eight, you'd find their references to the wilderness journeys of the children of Israel.

[7 : 17] For example, chapter eight, at verse 15, talking about the Lord who led his people out of the house of slavery in Egypt, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness.

Wherein there were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock and who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you to do good for you in the end.

That's the way the Lord sees the journey of his people through this world. Just as the children of Israel were journeying for 40 years through this terrible or terrifying wilderness, so the people of God realize that this world is a wilderness experience for them.

They have tasted of a better world. They have known something more grand and glorious and noble than this world wherein sin dwells and the temptations of Satan come our way and the darkness of unbelief and the trials and afflictions of life come our way with such frequency.

But the people of God have tasted of the new world. They have had a glimpse of the land of Canaan in heaven.

[9 : 00] And it says here that she's in the wilderness. If you were to walk in the wilderness, you would find it, I think, a very uncomfortable place, physically speaking. I mean, you haven't got the mod cons that enable you to relax in a luxurious way.

If you're camping or if you're out like that walking in that kind of environment, you find it a pretty uncomfortable experience on the whole.

And so did the children of Israel. They were in their tents in the wilderness. And the complicated matters they had to contend with fiery serpents and scorpions.

And various kinds of scorpions come our way as Christians in the wilderness journey. We have all kinds of sins seeking to sting us and to reinfect us and to paralyze us.

Sins that you may have felt you had left behind you long ago. Sins that may have been a bother for you in earlier years, but now seemingly have lost their strength.

[10 : 21] But all of a sudden they seem to have rejuvenated themselves and they will try and sweep you off your feet before you know where you are.

That's a terrifying experience. And the fiery serpents, when sin does sting you, it's a terrible experience.

But as Moses was commanded in the wilderness journey to create a brazen serpent and commanded the people who had been stung by the fiery serpents to look upon the serpent of brass and they would be healed.

So also we, when we are stung by sin and sin dominates our lives in whatever way, we are directed to Jesus, the great sin bearer, the one who was crucified and died in the room instead of sinners.

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* he has a reference to Robert coming and attacking the Christian. And the Robert took some of his stuff away.

[11 : 39] And we have Robert also seeking to spoil and despoil our hearts and lives as Christians. We have various kinds of enemies that will seek to undo our public witness, to undo our private devotional life.

There are various things that come our way to try and draw us into the world and draw us away from Christ and from the scriptures and from the throne of grace.

They seek to rob us of our comfort, to rob us of our faith, to rob us of our assurance, to rob us of any good thing that we may have experienced as Christian believers down the way.

But the church here is seen in the wilderness. But think also, the wilderness besides being an uncomfortable and a dangerous place, it can also be a very lonely place.

When you look at the expanse of desert and wilderness that people bring before our eyes on TV screens and so on, if you were to walk there, what a lonely experience it would be besides being dangerous.

[13 : 00] And so it can also be for the Christian. When you have to plow a furrow of experience that really you cannot explain to anybody else.

When you have to go through situations that other people cannot understand because they haven't been through themselves. And you are, as it were, set aside on your own with the scripture at the throne of grace with the Lord.

And you are lonely where you are because nobody understands you but the Lord alone.

And the wilderness is a great or expansive wilderness. We were talking a few moments ago before I came in about a Christian lady who had attained over a hundred years.

And she had said, I didn't want to live this long. You see, she was thinking, I assume, of the friend she had had down through the years and all of them had gone before her.

[14 : 23] It's as if she was alone in the world. Well, that may very well have been her experience. Other believers, they are called to heaven quite soon after they believe that wilderness isn't as long in terms of years or days.

But whatever it is and however long it is, the wilderness will be a wilderness for you. You will not always be in the lap of the luxury of heavenly experience and comfort.

No, the Lord will test you in the wilderness and prove you in the wilderness to show what's in your heart. Whether you will keep the commandments of God or not, and you won't.

And you will depend on Him who feeds you with His word. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God is what you hang on to and depend on and feed on as you journey on through the wilderness of life as a believer.

That's the first thing. Where she is. And I don't know where you are this morning so far as your wilderness experience is concerned.

[15 : 48] Maybe it's not long since you embarked on a Christian experience following the Lord Jesus by faith. But however long or short we take great comfort from knowing that the Lord led His people of old through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night.

He didn't leave them for one moment and He will not leave His people for a moment. However difficult or trying the circumstances might be, He has promised to take His people into the promised land.

And He will do so. He will do so. Second thing. We see here that she is coming up from the wilderness.

What is this really involved? Well I believe it involves this in particular. That she has been effectively called.

She has been called with a heavenly calling. The Lord has called her effectively. And when the Lord effectively calls us, that is in a day of our conversion, we turn our back upon the world and the things that we had embraced in the world.

[17 : 20] The things that were dear to us in the world. The things of the flesh. The things of this temporary world in which we find ourselves. We had embraced them and enveloped them and cherished them. But when the Lord comes with this effectual call, that tie between ourselves and these things is severed.

And we are given a desire to turn our back upon sin. Turn our back upon the things that were so precious to us but were so sinful in our previous experience.

Come out from among them. Touch not the unclean thing. You who bear the vessels of the Lord, He says through Isaiah. That is exactly what we see here. She is coming up from. She is coming away from the world.

She doesn't want to embrace the world anymore. The Christian as an individual because of the new principle of holiness that the Lord has instilled in his heart and life.

He desires better things than this world can offer. He desires a heavenly kingdom. And that's why she is moving away from the things of this world and her affections are set not on the things that are on the earth but on the things that are above.

[18 : 56] Where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. She is coming up from the world. And no wonder the question is asked, who is that?

Coming up from the wilderness. The great mass of humanity is happy enough with life in the wilderness. Happy enough with the sins that dominate and predominate among the sons of men. But we see here that someone has had a taste of better things and she is coming up from it. Has the Lord done this for you? Has the Lord so touched you in your heart and in your life that you are desirous of turning away from every known sin and turn with full purpose and endeavour after new obedience to Christ.

That's what the Bible says this individual is doing. She is coming up from the wilderness. She doesn't want to be involved with sin. She doesn't want to be involved with any carnal ways of doing things or thinking about things.

Doesn't want to become involved with the things that don't promote holiness of life.

[20 : 38] But in her coming up from the wilderness there are some very steep hills. The devil will try everything in his power to make your coming up from the wilderness as awkward and as difficult as possible.

He will try and encircle you with his whirlpools of temptations and you feel there is no real temptation in involving yourself with this particular situation.

But before you know it you have been drawn in slowly over days or weeks or even months. And before you know it you have lost your feet because the devil will try everything in his power to stop you making progress coming up from the wilderness.

And you know the mud of the wilderness will clean to your feet. The mud of the wilderness will slow you down.

And we will ask the Lord, Lord get rid of these things that hinder my progress. I don't know what hinders your progress in life as a Christian. It varies between different people.

[22 : 08] But I know that we all need to have the Lord's hand upon us to enable us to continue our walk upwards and onwards trusting in him.

We find that there are so many aspects of worldliness that would seek to present themselves as reasonable and innocuous and harmless to us.

Well, don't believe what the devil says. Don't believe what your own mind might say to you regarding these things.

You say, as far as I can I'm going to run from these things.

I remember the story, I think I might have told it here before about the lady in the olden days who was looking for a coachman. And she interviewed two or three men with a view to filling the position.

[23 : 22] And one of the questions she asked them was, how near would you be able to drive my coach to the edge of the cliff and still guarantee my safety?

And the first man said, well, I think I'd be able to take the wheel of the coach to about a foot from the edge of the cliff and guarantee your safety.

And the second man said, well, I can do better than that. I can take you within six inches of the edge of the cliff and you won't come to any harm.

Third man said, edge of the cliff? I'd steer as far away as I can from the edge of any cliff. And that's the way it is with us on sin. Flee from it as far as you possibly can. Whatever sin it is, whether it is a sin of thought or word or action, ask the Lord for grace.

Just like Pilgrim's progress, Christian, he ran and he cried, life, life, eternal life. And his back was toward the city of destruction which he had just left.

[24 : 42] Life, life, eternal life. And this is what we have here. The church is coming up from the wilderness.

But thirdly and finally, we see that she has a particular way of walking. She's coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved. Leaning upon her beloved.

Well, first of all, who is the beloved? Well, I think it's clear enough that it is Christ who's spoken of here, Christ Jesus himself. And how is he her beloved?

Well, when you go back in the scripture, you find that he first loved her. He has loved us with an everlasting love. It says that in the Old Testament.

From all eternity, he has loved his people. He has loved them as individuals. Their names are precious to him. They are written upon his hands. And he loved them with an everlasting and unchanging love.

[26 : 08] And he made that love known through the work of his Holy Spirit upon her heart and upon her life. And the apostle Paul was able to say, he loved me and gave himself for me.

His love dealt with me. His love was shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit. I was drawn to him and loved him because he first loved me. I couldn't love him. I didn't want him.

That's the story of every individual sinner. We don't want Christ. We have no space for him in our heart or life. But when his love comes, it changes things.

And he places the saving graces in our heart and life. And we are able to love him in return. And this is what we have here.

She is coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon the one who loved her. The one who has effectually called her. The one who has changed her heart and placed his commandments and law in her heart and in her mind.

[27 : 32] And now she leans upon him. What an amazing picture it is, isn't it? In this cold, dreary, dangerous wilderness, she has found arms that caress her.

She has found a bosom upon which to lay her head. She has found a strong one who is able to support her as she journeys on.

And again, little wonder the question is asked. Who is it coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon Christ? Not everyone is leaning on Christ. It's an unusual picture, isn't it?

Even in our communities where the Bible has been in every home for years, nevertheless not many of our people, in comparison to the total population, come to church.

Past so many people this morning on bicycles, between here and back. People walking dogs. People just doing their own thing.

[28 : 46] Well, not everybody leans upon Christ, but she is. She's leaning upon him and reclining upon him because he has loved her and her responses, I want to love you in return.

This is the exercise of faith as well as love. She is leaning upon him. That's why people who are converted, they come and trust Christ alone for salvation.

This is what happens when people are born again. They are given saving grace of faith whereby they receive Christ and rest upon him alone for salvation, freely offered to them in the Gospel.

And now he says she is leaning upon him. Don't you lean upon Christ? Well, how do you lean on him? Or why? Well, first of all, do you not lean on him?

Because he is the mediator between yourself and God. And as mediator, he is your prophet. You lean on him because he teaches you by his word and spirit, God's will for your salvation.

[30 : 23] When you come to the Bible, you ask, Lord, show me yourself. Show me the way. It's as if you are leaning on him who is the greatest of all teachers.

He is the one who teaches you God's will for your salvation and you lean upon him. You don't come to the Bible in your own strength, depending on your own ability to interpret or understand it.

No, you want the Holy Spirit to teach and lead and guide you. And the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son. And here you are leaning upon him as the one who teaches you.

Isn't it amazing that he makes us teach Abel? We're weren't at one point in our lives willing to comply with what the Bible says.

But no, we are made ready to comply and to embrace what the Bible says and embrace the Christ of the Scriptures as he reveals himself to us. So we lean upon him and rely upon him in that way.

[31 : 38] Don't you also lean upon him as your great high priest? Because as our mediator, he exercises the offices of prophet and priest and king.

And you rely upon him as your great high priest. What does that involve? Well, surely it involves two things. First of all, that he has offered in your room instead one sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile you to God.

That is his work as high priest. But then that work has another aspect to it in that he ever lives to make intercession for us at the right hand of God.

And we don't have a high priest who doesn't know us where we are and who doesn't understand what our circumstances are. However complicated they might be and however difficult for us to reason them out, we rejoice to know that he knows.

And he knows us where we are and how we are. And as our great high priest before the throne, he makes continual intercession for us.

[33 : 04] And isn't that an amazing thing? Leaning upon your beloved who intercedes at the right hand of glory. And remember, his intercession always prevails. Always prevails.

He never has a day when his intercession is not received and answered. Hallelujah, what a saviour the hymn writer said.

And then it goes on and you rely upon him and lean upon him as your king. As your king. Well as your king, he rules you and defends you and throwing you on the catechists of the year.

And you want to be ruled by him, don't you? You don't want to rebel against him. You want him to rule you in your thinking and in your outlook and in your plans. You want to be ruled by him.

To do your will, I take delight. The psalmist said, oh Lord, the Lord my God. And we see here, she leans upon him as a king. Happy to be ruled by him as she journeys through this terrifying wilderness with all its pitfalls and all its trials and all its darkness and afflictions.

[34 : 45] Because she knows that the king governs all. What an amazing thought that is.

God reigneth, the psalmist says, let the earth rejoice and the isles rejoice each one. Let the earth be glad and the isles rejoice each one. So she's leaning on him as a king who rules her, who defends her.

Isn't this something for which you are amazingly thankful always? That he defends you from all the enemies that surround you. All the dangers that the wilderness holds. You can see some enemies coming.

Many of them you cannot see coming. The Lord saw Peter's enemies coming. Peter didn't see them. At the time of the Lord's arrest and Peter denied him three times.

Simon, Simon, Satan has decided to have you. That he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you. That your faith fail not. The Lord saw the enemies coming. The Lord sees your enemies coming.

[36 : 09] And all to rest in the bosom of my king when the enemies are around me. To rest in the arms of Jesus, the almighty arms of our savior as we journey on.

And he's going to subdue us to himself. And he's going to conquer all his own and our enemies.

Well, there are many enemies nowadays may be threatening your life and your witness.

Enemies that will seek to undo your whole credibility as a Christian man or woman. But Christ is mightier than all these enemies.

And we relax in him and rejoice in him and we lean upon him and trust in him every step of the way. In the dark days, we rejoice to know that he is a light. In our ignorance, we rejoice to know that he is all knowing.

In our weakness, we rejoice to know that he is the almighty one. In our questionings, we rejoice to know that he knows the end from the beginning.

[37 : 36] Who is that coming up from the wilderness? Leaning upon our beloved. Have you started leaning upon him? On whose arm do you lean? On whom do you lean? On yourself? On your own wisdom?

On just the whims that come your way? Well, these things at the end of the day will not bring you safely into heaven. But when you rely on Jesus, he will bring you safely every step of the way.

Will you not look to him? Will you not call to him? Call upon me, he says, in your day of trouble and I will answer you.

He knows us where we are and his grace is sufficient for us and his strength is made perfect in our weakness. O come and let us commit ourselves to him and follow him as we journey through this wilderness of life.

Amen, let us pray. We pray, O Lord, for your spirit to be upon us as we have been thinking about your word and about your own glorious self in it.

[39 : 13] We ask that you would fill us with your love, that we might have an awareness of your love for us and that we might know your grace and strength as we journey through life.

We pray for your blessing upon us now as we sing your praise in conclusion and that you would forgive every sin in Jesus' name. Amen.