

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE LILY AND THE LILIES

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

Song of Solomon 2:1-2

The Bible is a love story unlike any ever penned by the hand of men. It is the delight of the LORD in HIS "love" that moved HIM to redeem her from the auction block in the slave market of sin, where she had willingly sold her own self into captivity to escape HIS rule over her. While she had done everything in her power to escape from HIM, even thinking to hide her nakedness behind a fig leaf apron of her own making, thinking that she could cover her disobedience by the actions of the same sinful flesh which caused it. She even thought to throw off HIS rule by taking her fill of many lovers and drowning herself in her own, religion, lusts, and pleasures, hiding herself among the heathen and being found in all ways by her own nature a child of wrath even as those she consorted with.

But long before she ever drew breath or even heard the name of the LORD, she was one loved by HIM with an everlasting love, and long before she ever manifested her own wickedness and unfaithfulness to HIM who loved her from the beginning, she was the delight of HIS eyes and the one chosen to be the bride of HIS only begotten SON. HE betrothed her to HIS SON long before the first star was ever set in place or any molecule of this world was ever formed, yea before its design was ever taken from HIS drawing board, she was the one chosen to be wed to HIS CHIEF DELIGHT, the ETERNAL SON of GOD.

The SON of GOD (being ONE with the FATHER) loved her who was given to HIM. HE delighted in her, and determined to manifest (to HIS whole creation) the glory of HIS grace and HIS everlasting love to her, in the open display of HIS redemption of her by the giving of HIMSELF in her behalf. She was HIS and hidden in the bosom of HIS everlasting love before HE created this world in which HE would make this declaration of HIS love known. HE was already her SAVIOR ("the LAMB slain from the foundation of the world" Rev.13:8, see Isa.53) before HE ever made the world in which she would be lost and brought into captivity according to HIS own design to manifest the glory of HIS grace in her redemption.

Who has ever known another love like HIS? *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, by (grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."* (Eph 2:4-7) It is a love of which we can pinpoint no beginning and it is a love which shall endure forever. *"The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."* (Jer 31:3)

This is the tapestry of the course of this world, in which every thread is woven by the hands of HIM who has designed the whole. There is not even one, insignificant tuft of yarn, in the whole grand work which is not necessary to its beauty, no color which is by chance, nor any stroke that has gone into its weaving which is less than the purpose of HIM who both

designed it and produced it as a glorious thing of beauty. *"And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."* (Exo 33:19) *"Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."* (Rev 21:9)

The BRIDEGROOM is the most important participant in this love story for it is HE who has instigated this love affair. HE could have any bride HE desired and it is this one which HE has ever loved, choosing her and fashioning her as the bride of HIS delight. While HE is the *"ROSE of Sharon,"* and the *"LILY of the valleys,"* possessing an innate beauty, yet it pleased HIM, for the great love which HE had for this bride, to become ONE stripped of all beauty and esteemed as ONE condemned in order to purchase her, when she as yet manifested no love for HIM and continually despised HIS way. *"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."* (Isa 53:2-5) *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom 5:8)

HE described HIS bride as *"the lily among thorns"*. We have all heard the saying describing a person considered less than attractive by the standard of men as one who *"had a face only a mother could love."* How it could ever be that the LORD could see HIS bride as *"a lily"* in this setting *"among thorns"* is beyond the capability of men to explain or fathom. HE described this love through the prophet's pen, *"Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine."* (Eze 16:8)

HE loved her before she was cast among the thorns and therefore HIS love for her was in no wise diminished by the terrible condition she came to be in. None other eye pitied her nor did anyone come to her aid, for the world knew her not even as it knew HIM not. She appeared to no one else a *"lily"* but to HIM who continued that love which HE began. *"None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."* (Eze 16:5-6)

Because she belonged to HIM she was the apple of HIS eye, that one in whom HE took great delight. The fact that she had been cast among the thorns in no wise deterred HIM from rushing to HER aid, a mighty DELIVERER to take her from her captivity among these brambles. Though HE thought it not robbery to be equal with GOD HE made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant, willingly suffering the damage of the thorns to HIS own body, counting it a joyful thing that HE might rescue HIS beloved spouse. *"when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: (Isa 53:10-11) "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Heb 12:2)

It has pleased HIM in the ages to come to present this one (who is persecuted and hated in the earth) as HIS bride without spot or blemish. Then she shall be viewed by all, covered in that beauty which is HIS, for she shall be like HIM, conformed to HIS image most completely.

In Sharon's lovely ROSE Immortal beauties shinel

Its sweet refreshing fragrance shows Its origin divine.

How blooming and how fair! Oh may my happy breast

This lovely ROSE forever wear, and be supremely blest. Lloyd's Hymnal, #75

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