

Song of Solomon 2: 2 - "Like a Lily among Thorns" (Part 2), Sermon # 21 in the series - "I am My Beloved's", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 6th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The last time that we were together, I spoke to you about how the Church of Jesus Christ is seen by Him as a Lily. He is the Chief Lily and we are the lilies of His planting; of grace. We saw that the Church represents the Lord Jesus Christ here upon the earth. He is in heaven reigning and ruling from His place at the right hand of the Father. We, His saints, are the lily among the thorns. He has finished His work; but you and I are in the process of hopefully representing the beauty and glory of Christ and His grace; to other people around us while we are here upon the earth. Now today we want to go on to a second point. We want to think about the truth that as Jesus Christ was a Lily of the valleys, even so we will be a lily among the thorns. We are going to receive some opposition to what we are doing as Christians, and we want to understand what kind of opposition that it will be. So having looked at how the Church and each of God's people is a lily; this afternoon we would like - **Secondly - to look at the truth that these Lilies are set among thorns and what that means.**

"Like a lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters." Christ here calls His Bride a lily among the thorns; but notice that he also calls her "His love". Will you not remember, O Christian, that Christ loves you very much? Not only did He, in love, lay down His precious life for you, but He loves you now in all your struggles and difficulties in relation to sinful people in this world; people who do not love you, and who may hurt you and take advantage of you if they can. Christ's love is real, and He is raised from the dead, and He ever lives to make intercession for you. I would like you to turn to the book of Zechariah, Chapter 3, verses 1-9, and here we will have the veil lifted for us as to what goes on in the heavenly places in regard to the people of God and Christ's intercession. This passage records the malicious accusations of Satan against Joshua the High Priest during that time period of the rebuilding of the temple after the 70 years captivity. The Lord Jesus, who is referred to as "My Servant the Branch" in verse 8, and "the Angel of the Lord" in verse 1, was standing by Joshua to defend Him because he was one of God's Elect people. "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at His right hand to oppose him." "And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you Satan!' "The who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!" "Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel." "Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.'" "And to him He said, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.'" "And I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.'" "So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him." "And the Angel of the Lord stood by." "Then the Angel of the

Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of Hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, and if you keep My command, then you shall also judge My house, and likewise have charge of My courts; I will you places to walk among these who stand here.'

Let us think for a minute about these words. Joshua the high priest of the nation of Israel was the man who would represent the people of God as a minister, but he himself needed to be cleaned up, spiritually speaking, to do so. In the heavenly places Satan was standing at Joshua's right hand to oppose him. He had come there before the Lord to accuse Joshua of some sins that are not specifically mentioned, but which evidently had tarnished his reputation in the heavenly places, as he stands before God. But the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, represented as "the Angel of the Lord" is there to intercede for Joshua and to prevail against Satan in all of his attempts to disqualify Joshua from being able to effectually engage in his ministry before God; the Lord knowing full well that it was Joshua's desire and to help forward the building of the second temple by offering gifts and offerings for sin. I believe that this Old Testament picture is given to us here as a type of what the Lord Jesus does for each and every one of his people who would represent Him in a fallen world. They are tainted and tarnished by sins of various sorts; but Christ would make them his lilies. Satan would like to keep them in filthy garments, but the Lord Jesus will be faithful to clean you up as one of His saints. This means that when Satan would oppose you and accuse you before the throne of God because of all the inconsistencies and sins that he sees in your life; that Christ is right there as your Advocate and He will be speaking to the Father on your behalf and He will be reminding His Just God and Father, in His Holy Presence, of the things which He has done for you on the cross. He will also take deliberate action to see to it that your sins and iniquities are cleansed, and you are clothed with the rich robes of salvation, when you are trusting in Him. He will remind the Father and you as well through His Word, of those things which He is presently doing for you, and even the things that He is going to do for you in the future if you will be repenting of your sins and walking by faith in Him, and obedience to Him. I hope that you understand that without Christ's intercession you could never stand against the thorns of Satan's schemes in this life; schemes that you will most certainly encounter as you are trying to live your life to the glory of God. You, as a believer are a lily among thorns. But the devil shall not prevail against you who are trusting in Christ.

But let us also understand that these thorns also represent wicked people who would oppose the building of the walls of our New Testament Zion; the Church. I want to turn you to several verses now, to show you the truth that people who are unbelievers, and who are being led along by Satan to act wickedly against the people of God; are those who are being spoken of as thorns in the passage that we are studying. Turn with me to 2nd Samuel, Chapter 23, and verse 2. Here we have the last words of King David. And His words are of great significance to our understanding how the godly should expect opposition from those who rebel

against God and His Word. "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue." "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.'" "And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth (could we also say, like a lily?), by clear shining after rain." "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure." (This covenant is the New Covenant, the work of Christ on the cross. It is His resurrection from the dead after He triumphed over sin and death, which gives Him the power to build a sure and secure holiness in His people) "For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?" Christ so works in the hearts of each of His Elect people that they understand that He has placed this same desire for holiness in each of His people's hearts, and He will also cause that desire to increase as time goes by. "But the sons of rebellion shall be as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands." "But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place." What this is saying here is that those who rebel against the righteous rule of God and Christ over their lives are like thorns. They are those who will oppose God's people in every way that they can, when God's people go about to keep God's Word and live their lives righteously.

What generation of Christians has not faced this? Thorns will hurt you if you try to touch them. Rebellious sinners will hurt you if you put your finger on their favorite sins and try to show them that they are wrong to pursue them. There are many evil men in the world today, and they will grow worse and worse in their sins as time goes by. "Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3: 13) The only way that they will not hurt you is if there are righteous laws and good police force, or army to protect you. You will have to be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear. You will have to have Constitutional political rights and enforcement of those political rights in your favor as a Christian in order for the cause of Christ to make real progress and the building of the walls of Zion to take place. The importance of this is very great and it is being largely forgotten in our generation. Before the Constitutional government of the United States of America, religious freedom was really a very tenuous thing. Many Christians were persecuted and killed for trying to live according to their conscience in relation to the Bible. It was only the Lord's immediate care and protection over them; His fighting for them, and ruling as a king to defend them, that has ever kept the Lord's people safe from the harm of persecutors. The stories are too many to list. As a lily among the thorns so is my love among the daughters. The daughters were the nations surrounding Israel and Jerusalem that opposed her rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after her 70 years captivity in the Old Testament. The book of Nehemiah talks about the thorns of men who opposed the rebuilding. Chapter 2, verse 9 says, "then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. "Now

the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me." "When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel." And then look down at verse 19. "But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us, and said, "What is this that you are doing?" "Will you rebel against the king?" "So I answered them, and to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem." These men were acting as thorns, but Nehemiah knew how to answer them. Chapter 4, verses 7-11 show how he handled these thorns. "Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion." "Nevertheless we made our prayer to God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. You see; Nehemiah needed the favor of the king to be able to get letters from the king to begin the work of building, and he needed to courageously stand against the evil men who tried to get him to stop building. You and I need these same things today to be able to make real and substantial progress with the gospel. If possible, we very much would like to have the support of the political powers that be, and then too, we need to courageously take our stand against evil men who would oppose the building of the walls of Zion.

These kind of men who oppose the good work of preaching the gospel and planting churches and building up the Church's defenses; these men are the thorns who are moved by Satan to oppose, to accuse, and to destroy if possible, the work, the cause, and the kingdom of our God and His Christ. This is a good example of the Chief Lily interceding for, and defending, all of His lilies whom He loves when they are surrounded by thorns. The Lord Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build. The "daughters" who are the thorns that Christ's Lily is surrounded by, in our text in Song of Solomon 2: 2, are the nations around Israel, who are set against her. Zechariah 2: 5 speaks of what the Lord would do to protect His Lily. "For I," says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst." Verse 7 says, "Up Zion!" "Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." "For thus says the Lord of Hosts: He sent Me after glory, the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye." (Might we say also, "His Lily?") Christ will defend and help His persecuted and oppressed people. The "daughters" who are thorns today, in New Testament times, are those nations and kingdoms which oppose the rule and reign of Christ over them, through the means of tyrannical leaders and political laws which attempt to keep Christians from worshiping God in accordance with the Bible, and which attempt to keep them from preaching and sharing the gospel. What is written in Zechariah 2, verse 10 applies to the great days of the New Covenant times just as much as to the days of Zechariah. "Sing and rejoice, O

daughter of Zion!" "For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord." "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people." "And I will dwell in your midst." The greatest times of the building of the Church are yet to come, when the Lord will get rid of the persecuting thorns and save many among the nations, during the time period of the Millennium when Satan will be bound. This is well pictured in Isaiah 27, verses 1-4. "In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea." "In that day sing to her, a vineyard of red wine!" "I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day." "Fury is not in Me." "Who would set briers and thorns against Me in battle?" "I would go through them, I would burn them together." "Or let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." "Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit." This is saying that those who will make peace with God through Jesus Christ shall no longer be thorns. They shall become His lilies, and they shall become His vineyard of wine. They will take root in Christ and bear fruit in Him. Great days do lie ahead for the Church because our Lord Jesus Christ has destroyed the power of the devil at the cross, and He will destroy the briers and thorns of men who oppose His kingdom's advance into the hearts of men. He will "go through them and burn them together."

We, as Christians have a solemn responsibility, however, to see to it that we are wise as serpents and innocent as doves. We have a responsibility to guard our souls from the way of perverse people. Turn with me to Proverbs 22: 4 and 5. "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life." "Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them." Ask yourself this afternoon if you are guarding yourself from the way of the perverse. Trying to obtain physical power over other people; using force and violence to make their way in this life; this is the way of the perverse. These are the "thorns" of our text. Guard yourself from them, and remember the words of Proverbs Chapter 2, verse 7 and following. "The Lord stores up sound wisdom for the upright." "He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints." "Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path." "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the way of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked and who are devious in their paths." You see; these are the thorns. You have a responsibility as a Christian to run with righteous and holy people.

And then finally, the thorns which this lily, Christ's Church, is set among are the cares of this life. You probably remember the parable of the Sower in Matthew

13. When the sower of the seed, the Word of God, sowed some of the seeds, they fell among the thorns and the thorns sprang up and choked them. And in the interpretation of the parable our Lord says in verse 22, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becomes unfruitful." This is what we must study hard to avoid as we live our Christian life. See to it that you guard your heart and your life, not only from worldly wicked men, who are well-pictured by thorns; but that you also guard yourself from the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. If these grow up in your heart, they will choke the word and they will make it very difficult or even impossible for you to be able to bear fruit to God. Do not let the world steal away the beauty that Christ has given to you. You are one of His lilies if you have believed in Him for eternal life. I pray that each one of you, as one of His Lilies, would be able to well represent the beauty and glory and strength of the grace of Christ as the days go back until He shall call you to be with Himself.