

"SONG OF SONGS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Song of Songs 2:10-11; 7:10; 8:6-7

Introduction.

All Scripture is inspired by God and all Scripture is profitable for instruction and training in righteousness, for training in wisdom and in the knowledge and love of God.

Song of Songs is wisdom literature, the fifth and final book of wisdom for how to take care of God's good gifts so that they are a blessing to us and don't become a curse.

The Poetic Books: Wisdom for Time and Eternity

- Job: *Wisdom for Suffering*
- Psalms: *Wisdom for Worshipping, for praying and praising*
- Proverbs: *Wisdom for Living, acting, behaving*
- Ecclesiastes: *Wisdom for Dying, and enjoying life under the sun until we do.*
- Song of Solomon: *Wisdom for Loving*

This book has been titled several ways. The Song of Solomon, obviously designates the author. In some Catholic versions it is called the Canticles, which is Latin meaning simply "songs." The Hebrew title from verse 1, The Song of Songs, means "the most superlative, or best or greatest, of songs."

We find a similar construction in other famous biblical phrases: Lord of Lords, King of Kings, and Holy of Holies.

I Kings 4:32 [Solomon] also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

This is the song to end all songs, the best of all songs. A rabbi said "All the writings of the Old Testament are holy, and the Song of Songs is the holy of holies".

Solomon's name is mentioned at least six times in the book, along with several royal advantages, palaces, gardens, all of which support his authorship, as well as the mention of many wives and concubines (6:8). He is fairly young, as the

youthful exuberance suggests and the low number of women in his harem (140, 1 Kings 11:3).

Song of Songs is unique in the OT. The uniqueness of the book is profoundly evident from verse 2 on.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Deuteronomy 1:1 These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Song of Songs 1:1-4 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.

This song is a love poem from beginning to end, filled with the imagery of romance and intimacy. It is about the feelings of what it is like to be deeply in love. This is a collection of love songs from a romance that became a happy marriage.

It is written as a single poem, no prose. It highlights the beauty of God's gift of physical love between a married couple. Song of Songs stands out with its uniquely detailed vision of the beautiful reality of the mysteries of human love expressed in marriage.

The outline is simple, moving from courtship to marriage to honeymoon to married love and to dealing with the fears, problems and anxieties of married life.

The courtship (1:1 - 3:5)

The wedding (3:6 - 5:1)

The maturing marriage (5:2 - 8:14).

This song/poem is an historical record of the romance of Solomon with a Shulamite woman. Obviously, Solomon does not furnish the best example of marital devotion, for he had many wives and concubines (140 at this time, 6:8; many more later, 1 Kings 11:3). The experiences recorded in this book may reflect the only (or virtually the only) pure romance he had.

What can we learn from a polygamist? Perhaps it is like what we learned from his pursuits of pleasure in Ecclesiastes. After exhausting every other possible avenue,

he is wise enough to warn us that life apart from a relationship with God is like trying to catch the wind.

After giving himself to polygamy and discovering how unfulfilling, fruitless and empty it is, he is wise enough to extol the supreme virtues of marriage as best between one man and one woman. God's ways really are the best ways.

The book has three major players: the bride (Shulamite), the king (Solomon), and a chorus (daughters of Jerusalem). In the Song we hear those three voices: the woman (beloved) who plays the leading role; the man (the lover) who celebrates the beauty of, and his love for, the woman; and the woman's companions, called the "daughters of Jerusalem."

Interpretations.

How should we understand this wonderful book of the Bible? There have been many diverse attempts at interpreting this unique book. I will mention only the most common.

The *allegorical* view. Many Jews take this story as an allegory of God's love for Israel, and some Christians have viewed the bride and groom as a pre-figuration of Christ and His love for the Church.

The most obvious and plain approach seems best, to take it at face value and interpret it in the normal historical sense. This love poem mentions real places and real people and real conversations and real love. It is a poetic description of a romance between a husband and a wife.

Imagery in the Song.

Let me offer one specific note of interpretation. How are we to take some of the imagery used to describe the beauty of the lovers.

Song of Songs 4:1-2 Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.

2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing,
Her hair is like a flock of goats, her teeth are like a flock of sheep.

Song of Songs 1:9 I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.

The primary correspondence is not visual, it is meant to be figurative rather than literal. The comparison is to the quality, the excellence, so the mare among

Pharaoh's chariots refers to being the best of all. It is taken in the most flattery way, the highest praise.

What is it really about?

This book emphasizes the supremacy of love. Human life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of a man and a woman in marriage. There are two fundamental, foundational truths that uphold this love.

Commitment.

Love is specific, between one woman and one man. She is called a bride. They are married. Their love is exclusive, excluding/forsaking all others. "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16; 6:3).

The covenant of marriage is protected by a covenant oath, by vows to remain faithful to one and only one other person.

This Song teaches the sanctity and beauty of marriage as God intended it to a culture that had lost the sanctity of sexuality and the purity of marriage. It is both ancient and modern.

It is a strong rebuke of all sexual immorality in all its manifestations and a reaffirmation of monogamous love as God's ideal for humankind.

The book is unflinchingly clear that physical intimacy is based on a commitment found only in the covenant bonds of marriage.

Their marriage is marked and blessed by intimacy and commitment—and these two are not to be severed. Physical intimacy is the seal of a sacred covenant.

"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave" (8:6). Real love lasts, because it's not a one-night flight but a life-long commitment.

We know that Solomon sinned against his own wisdom, both in Proverbs and in this Song. He didn't practice what he preached. He didn't know when to draw the line, especially when it came to weddings and faithful commitment. We are to do as he says, not what he did.

Commitment. Until death do us part.

Communication.

Love is expressive, affirming.

None of this, “I told you I loved you when we got married and if anything changes I will let you know.”

Conversation, encouraging words, words that build up and bless are foundational to marital love.

Godly spouses use words to encourage one another. The husband calls his wife the “most beautiful among women” (1:8). She is clearly the apple of his eye. He repeatedly uses speech to express his appreciation for her.

Likewise, the wife lavishes praise on her husband, “Your love is better than wine” (1:2), and calls on him to pursue her, “Draw me after you; let us run” (1:4). In a good marriage, a husband and wife are never stingy with kind words.

Ephesians 4:29, 31-32 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ... 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Children should hear I love you and see hugs, kisses and romantic attention, signs of affection.

No sexual immorality.

With the positive there is also warning for danger always lurks. There is a strong refrain in the poem.

“Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.” (2.7, 3.5, 8.4)

Don't start the fire too soon, or you will get burned. It's worth waiting for. So, wait. Passion is good when it is protected by purity. Passion without purity is selfish lust.

Sex disconnected from the marriage covenant is not love but lust, and because it is sin, it will destroy the soul. It isn't just a violation of God's good commands, it is destructive to us because it misuses and abuses what was meant for good.

Sex is good because God created it good. But it is good in ways that the world knows nothing about, and in its pursuit of sex has destroyed and polluted it. The sanctity and purity of marriage is to be protected and preserved, especially in this age of all out assault on marriage and the marriage bed.

Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Ephesians 5:3-5 Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

I Thessalonians 4:3-5 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Satan's hatred of God's good gifts is evident in our world that has destroyed the beauty of God's gift by dragging it out in the open in TV, movies, videos, porn, social media.

In a world in which Satan works overtime to undermine and destroy human sexuality and relationships, the Song of Solomon stands as a bulwark to show us a better way. Song of Songs restores the beauty where it belongs, in the safety of marriage behind the closed doors of the bedroom. It is not for public consumption.

It reinforces the truth and goodness of marriage in a world that has no clue and keeps trying to find pleasure in all the wrong places. Such is our world.

Guard your marriage, guard your heart, guard your eyes. Avoid every compromise with the world. We must pursue holiness, what is pleasing to God.

We show how much we love God and value His good gifts when we receive them and treat them the way He knows is best, by protecting them from the world, the flesh and Satan, by not polluting them through our own sinful lusts and temptations.

Jesus

Human love points to the source of love, to the love of God in Christ Jesus. Our love is finite and faltering, God's love is eternal and unchanging.

There is a picture in marriage of Christ's great love for His church. The Bible repeatedly uses marriage as a metaphor for the divine-human love relationship, the profound mystery of Christ's unfailing love for his sinful bride.

Ephesians 5:25-27 ... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

“The Song of Songs point forward to Christ. As the wife longs to be with her husband (1:4; 3:1–4), so the Christian longs to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). As the husband woos his wife with words (4:1–16; Eph. 5:26), so Christ woos us with his Word (John 10:27). As the love of a husband and wife is to be indelible (8:7) so nothing can separate us the love of Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37–39)” (Aaron Menikoff).

It points to the love of all loves, the love of God in Christ Jesus, poured out on us, the most undeserving of all recipients. The greatest of all loves is not found in romance or marriage, but at the cross, in Christ.

Desire wisdom, desire your husband or wife, and above all desire Christ.

Implications and application.

What a glimpse into the loving nature and character of our God. He inspired this love poem and put it into His eternal Word. God created us male and female, God created marriage, God created us capable of having and enjoying physical intimacy. God created us to know love, and to be able to give and receive love. God created us to enjoy pleasure, have feelings and emotions.

Marriage and marital intimacy are God's good gifts, created by God for His glory and for our blessing and enjoyment. They are evidence of God's grace and goodness. Receive them with thanksgiving, protect them with all diligence and purity, use them for His glory.