

Song of Songs: A Love Story

June 9, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Song of Songs, a Love Story." Thank you to Paul, Geoff, Janet, and Don for being part of the video. The script you're reading is Song of Songs 8, 6 to 7.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Welcome. Glad to see you here today and online. I don't see you, but I have faith that you're there. And let's start this morning, or whenever you're watching this, by reading Psalm 146. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Do not put your trust in princes and human beings who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground. On that very day, their plans come to nothing. Blessed are those whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. He remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free. The Lord gives sight to the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner, sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the way of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

We have a couple of announcements today. Happy birthdays to Barb and Dawn. Did you know you had birthdays sorry, same time you were anniversary? Oh, it's anniversary. That makes more sense. That would be odd if it wasn't in close to each other. Well, congratulations. There are mission updates on the back from Papua New Guinea and France. June 9th, special collection for Ruth's printing ministry. And mark your envelopes checks for e-transfers, PNG printing. And if you want to talk to, I assume, Adam more about that.

Wednesday evening Bible class, 730, May and June, 1st John. This is how we know. Please come out to that if you're interested. And next week we'll have a special presentation from Camp Omagh. During June, donations to the camp are matched by a grant. So if you're interested, please mark your donations for Camp Omagh envelopes checks, e-transfers to Camp Omagh. And there are work days scheduled for Camp Omagh on the 1st and the 15th of June. And added bonus, lunch is provided. So there you go.

Prayer requests. Alicia D, one of our missionaries in France, is recovering from a viral sickness, and Care passing away on May 18th. Celebration of her life will take place here at 2 p.m. today. And her family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to GLCHS, Hospice-- or Hospice Waterloo.

Let's go to God in prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for all you've given us and all you've blessed us with. Thank you for this time that we have to worship you, to listen from your word, to express our thankfulness, our gratitude, and also to hopefully think a little more about you and dedicate ourselves a little more to you. Thank you for all that you've done. Help us to be, to leave here as a people who have worshiped you today, in Jesus' name, amen.

Communion

I like to take a look at what arrives in my email box the week that I'm asked to preside at the table. And I'll admit to you that I procrastinated a day or two when what landed in my inbox this week was Song of Solomon. Because I try to think of something that I think will tie into what we're doing. I was a little hesitant when it was Song of Solomon to be honest with you. But as I read it and as I pondered it and looked at it, one thing jumped out at me. Because it's my contention that no matter where you're reading in the Bible you can see the fingerprints of Jesus because the entire Bible is about Him. And as I read the passage that Don had picked out this week, what jumped out at me was one of the lines in verse 6, chapter 8 of the Song of Songs.

For love is as strong as death. Solomon's eyes, and I'm sure Don's going to explain everything about this to us in a few minutes. In Solomon's eyes, love is that powerful. It's as powerful as death. But I thought about it and I said to myself, God's love is far more powerful than death. God's love is not as strong as death. God's love is stronger than death. We have been redeemed from death by God. Jesus was raised from death by God. We have been reconciled to God in baptism.

The fact that Jesus was raised is central to those three things that I'm talking about this morning. Redemption, raising, and reconciliation. They all find their fulfillment at a hill in Calvary when Jesus gave himself up for us and God chose to raise him so that that tomb was empty three days later. The redemption of a sinful people, and every one of us is, was planned long, long ago by God. The reconciliation, the getting back together, and I like the song that was picked this morning. It reminded me of the bride. That's what God is looking forward to. But it all hinges on the fact that Jesus died and was raised at Calvary.

I think the most often quoted book in the entire Bible, John 3 and 16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his son that whoever believes in him will have everlasting life." That's all about God's strength of his love for us. We have been redeemed because Jesus was raised. We have reconciliation with God because Jesus was raised. We take this short time now this morning to break bread and to drink from this cup to remember that it was his gift and that God so loved the world that he gave him for us. God's love is indeed stronger than death. Let's go to him in prayer.

Father, we thank you so much that from before the heavens were created, you understood that we would need salvation. And you built into this world a plan that would give up your most precious son on our behalf. And now, Father, as we break this bread and as we drink from this cup, we remember that it was his willingness to go to the cross that meant he was an acceptable sacrifice for you. And it was your willingness to let him go that was the reason that you raised him in power. We thank you so much, Father, for what it promises us. We thank you for this bread and this little bit of grape juice that remind us that all of heaven at that time at Calvary was in mourning, but three days later was rejoicing as we rejoiced this morning. Thank you for your love stronger than death and your promise of a life with you. We pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit. Amen.

Reading

Song of Songs 8:6-7

Good morning. Our reading this morning is from the Song of Songs, Chapter 8, verses 6 to 7.

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death, it's jealousy unyielding as the grave, it burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame, many waters cannot quench love, rivers cannot sweep it away, if one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

Sermon

Song of Songs: A Love Story

Good morning everyone. Thank you so much for being with us. There are books in the Bible that we often spend a lot of time with, the book of John and several other books. I would suggest that this book, The Song of Songs, is one of the least studied books, probably because it's so explicit. And I'm going to have to be very...dance around some of the words that are in this book. But they are...it's a love story is what it is more than anything else. For example, in The Song of Songs, or The Song of Solomon, there's a man speaking, there's a woman speaking, and there are friends who will be speaking. And it's very much a romantic relationship.

It begins with a woman speaking, and she says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine." And then the friends who are there with them, and somehow in my mind I'm thinking that everybody's out for a long walk. And there's a group of people sharing this. I don't know if that's true, but in my imagination it's something like that. This is a love song from Solomon or for Solomon, we're not sure. But the friends respond by saying, "We rejoice and delight in you. We will praise your love more than wine."

And then skipping on down to verse 8, the friends speak. So in my mind I'm thinking that everyone's walking along and they're having this dialogue. The friends say, "If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds they're wanting to meet together." And then again, he responds in verse 9. "I liken you my darling to a mare among a pharaoh chariots horses." I'm not so sure that's a polite thing today. I liken you my darling, you're like a horse. But it's not that.

Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make earrings of gold studded with silver. So it's interesting. Well, I've never seen a Valentine card like this and probably never will. And that is, it's a woman speaking now in verse 12. "While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance. My beloved to me, a sachet of mirth, my beloved to me is a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi." Yes, I did skip something and that's a good thing I did. And then in verse 15, it's the man speaking. How beautiful you are, my darling. Oh, how beautiful your eyes are doves. And then she says in verse 16, "How handsome you are, my beloved. Oh, how charming. And our bed is verdant." And then skipping down, it's a woman speaking. I am rows of Sharon. I think there are songs about that. A lily of the valleys. Like lily among thorns is my darling among the one women.

So Barb and I are responding, are just coming together with our anniversary. And I tried to find a card, you know, for Barb that would be nice. And I thought about maybe writing some of these things out, but I thought, "I don't think so." It's not what you would really call a love song. But back then, this was very much a love song. It was picturing it. It was walking outside. There's no highway. There are no cars. But there are people going from vineyards to vineyards, chatting and talking along with one another.

And so in chapter two, he says, "Listen, my beloved, here he comes leaping across the mountains bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows. I want to have a look at my love." Verse 10, "My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See the winter is past. The rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth. The season of singing has come. The cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig trees forms its early fruit and blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Oh, my beautiful one, come with me." And then he responds to that by saying, "My love in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face. Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes, the ruin in the vineyards, our vineyards are in bloom."

So far that's not overly romantic, but it's a love story and it's a love song. And again, we really have no idea what that song would be. She responds by saying, "My beloved is mine and I am his." This is a declaration of exclusivity. We're together with one another. Until that day breaks and the shadows flee, turn my beloved, and again, this is something you wouldn't hear in a card, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills. So it's interesting over the years how romantic things can change, but this is very much a love story in a time where it was not easy, where it wasn't always easy to collect food or to gather food or to be around. Sometimes you'd be miles and miles away from one another. But then he responds, or she responds, and she says, "I looked for the one my heart loves. I look for him, but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city through the searches of the squares and I will search the one that my heart loves. So I look for him, but I did not find him. The watchmen found me and they made their rounds in the city. Have you seen the one my heart loves? Scarcely have I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go."

So maybe we sometimes remember where our loved one, we've been away for a good long while. We haven't seen one another for a long, long time, maybe on for a variety of reasons. But then there's that reuniting, that lovely time that we can be together. And I love the scripture, "When I found the one my heart loves, I held him and would not let him go." And vice versa.

So then it says in verse six, and again, it's a woman speaking, "Who is coming up from the wilderness like the column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense, made from all the spices of the merchant. Look it's Solomon's carriage, escorted by 60 warriors, the noblest of Israel, all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with the sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night. King Solomon made for himself the carriage and made it from wood from Lebanon and posts he made of silver, his base gold in its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior inlaid with love." So I guess today we would say it was a great looking car, something that's just beautiful. Back then, here it is.

And there's this longing of them to be together, to share with one another. So now it's his turn to speak, chapter four, "How beautiful you are, my darling, oh how beautiful your eyes behind your veil are doves, your hair is like a flock of goats." Again, you wouldn't see this on a card. You gotta go with me on all this. And then in verse six, it says, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. All beautiful you are, my darling, there is no flaw in you. So come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon." And then verse nine, "You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride, you have stolen my heart." So I really believe this is put to music.

And then in verse 10, "How delightful is your love, my sister bride. How much more pleasing is your love than wine and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice. Your drips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride. The fragrance of your garments is like fragrance from Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride. You are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of tree, with myrrh and aloes, all of the finest spices. You are the garden fountain, a well flowing water streaming from the Lebanon." And then she says, "Awake, north wind and come south wind. Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my beloved come into the garden and taste all its choice fruits." And then he says, "I have come into the garden, my sister bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey. I have drunk my wine and my milk." I don't see that combination working out very well, but anyway that's what it was. And then the friends respond by saying, "Eat, friends, and drink. Drink your fill of love."

And then she says, and this is rather lengthy, "I slept but my heart was awake. Listen, my beloved is knocking. Open to me my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew rather, and my hair with the dampness of night." And then he skips down and she skips down and says, "My beloved, my beloved throws his hand through the opening." And then it says in verse 5, "I arose to open from my beloved." And then skipping down in verse 7, "The watchmen found me as they made their rounds." And then the friends, again, watching this speak. Verse 9, "How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful women? How is your beloved better than others that you say to us?" And she says, "Oh, my beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold, his hair is wavy and black as a raven." It doesn't seem too complimentary there, but anyway, "By the water streams, mounted like jewels, his cheeks are like beds of spice, yielding perfume." So this love story just continues on. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh, his arms, rods of gold set with topaz. His body like polished ivory, decked with lapis lazule. His eyes are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself. He is altogether lovely. There are hymns that have that comment. All together lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend.

I think that in marriage, that's true. Not only do we love one another, but he or she, best friend. This is my beloved. This is my friend. And so the friends are standing back watching all of this, listening to all of this. Chapter 6 says, "Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your beloved turn that we might look for him with you?" She says, "My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to the browse in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved and my beloved is mine." He browses among the lilies. And then he says, "You are as beautiful as Tirzah." And I didn't know what that meant, so I investigated. You are as beautiful as

Tirzah, a Canaanite city. You're as lovely as Jerusalem, as majestic as troops of banners. Turn your eyes from me, they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats. Coming from Gilead. Your teeth are like flock of sheep.

Coming up from the washing, each has its twin. None of them missing. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of pomegranate. Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines behold that number. And then later in verse 10, the friends again are speaking. Who is it that appears like the dawn? Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession.

And then he says, "I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth of the valley, to see the vines had budded or the promulgants in bloom before I realized my desire set me among the royal chariots my people." Upper class. The friends say, "Come back, come back, O Shulamite. Come back, come back and we will gaze on you." And then he says, "Why would you gaze on the Shulamite as on the dance of Manahaim?" Which again, I don't really understand with all of that. But I'm going to skip all the way over in verse 9, where she says, "May the wine go straight to my beloved, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I belong to my beloved and my desire is for me. Come my beloved, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines are budded, if their blossoms have opened and if the promulgants are in bloom. There I will give you my love." And the friends are standing back, listening, watching. And then the friends say, "Who is coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" And then in verse 6, it says, the woman speaking, "Place me like a seal over your heart." And I think there's a part of one of our hymns that say this, "Place me a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death." We've heard that before. For love is as strong as death. It's a happy, marital love. And then verse 7, "Many waters cannot quench love, rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

And then the friends say, "We have a sister. What shall we do for our sister? If she's a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she's a door, we will be enclosed with panels of cedar." Again, not something that we would normally say. But then he seems to wrap up.

And that she is speaking, and then he'll speak in a moment, but she says, "I am a wall, thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment. Solomon had a vineyard in Bailhammon. He let out his vineyard to his tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver, but my own vineyard is mine to give. The thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and the two hundred are those who tend its fruit." And then he speaks. "You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice." And then at the end, she says, "Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a stag or the spice-laden mountains. We will live happily ever after." It's not a sermon that is ever preached, but it's a love song.

It's a story of two people coming together, dealing with the challenges, dealing with surviving, dealing with family, dealing with life itself like we do today. It's just written differently, but it's this idea of, "Let's come together. Whatever challenges we have, we're going to work it out, but let's just go." And I think, at least it is, I think, for Barb and I and for many people, you know, it's just kind of nice when every once in a while you can get away. And it doesn't have to be expensive. In fact, it can be, "Let's just go for a walk. Let's just go to Niagara on the lake and go for a walk, go somewhere, and just share."

Life can sometimes be so difficult and so challenging that if we just stop to think, God said, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I am always with you." And if we can say that to our mate all the time, "I will never leave you. I love you. I will always be with you." The Song of Solomon, yeah, a book we don't read very often, but a wonderful, wonderful book. And everyone lived happily ever after.

Closing Prayer

Thank you all for coming today and for watching. Let's close with a word of prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for all you've given us and all you've blessed us with. Thank you for this time. Help us to remember you, your love, and help us to express that love to each other. In Jesus' name, amen.

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