

SongOfSolomon 19-12-19b

Ready now to resume our study in the Song of Solomon, where we are going to find that, as with all the rest of scripture, this is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. And one of the things that has happened with the whole idea of marriage and the physical intimacy that goes along with it is that this has been co-opted in the world for entertainment, for marketing, for illicit purposes. It's been made an end unto itself instead of a part of something that involves commitment, that involves longevity, that is a reflection in its own way of the kinds of relationship that people have tried to draw out through an allegorical or dramatic interpretation, looking at God's loyal love, the love that we should have for Him.

All of these are legitimate, but the book is not presenting itself as an allegory. It doesn't invite us to see God in the details of the groom, nor ourselves or Israel in the details of the bride. It's told from the bride's perspective.

And the idea here is unique really to Christianity and where sexuality in the modern day is really run amok and has taken all kinds of forms and without constraints, without the givens and the underpinnings of Christian ethics even in culture, there is little to define it or constrain it and it's out of its context. However, in the Song of Solomon, we find that physical relationship between a man and a woman is chaste. It represents the idea of love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial toward others.

And it is a part of a commitment and a bond and a covenant that goes well beyond this particular aspect. But without that covenant and without that bond, this is an engine looking for a car. This is a component that left to itself, it's like an airplane engine.

You can bolt it to a frame and crank it up, but until it's in a fuselage with wings and some guidance control and a purpose and a destination, it's never going to be anything like what God intended it to be. So we're going to see in this book that the misuse of sexuality and of intimacy between man and woman often has taken religious form. You remember in the ancient day, the pagans had the temple to Aphrodite and one thing and another, there's all of this perverse association.

And so this drove people in the opposite direction. And so you have the Catholic church, for example, saying, well, sex is only for procreation within marriage and nobody should have any fun and they shouldn't enjoy it. It's a utilitarian method of bringing new Catholics into the world.

And that is set aside by this book. And one of the reasons I believe it is in the canon of scripture is to celebrate the joy and the fun and the excitement that this particular component brings to the relationship between a man and a woman. It is not just a means of bringing the next generation into existence.

It is an area for expression of wonderful things. And as such, it is not an allegory, but certainly an

analogy to the wonderful benefits and the joy and fulfillment that we have in our relationship with God through Christ and that ancient Israel had in their relationship with God or could have. But it's not allegorical.

It's not a story whose details are gonna follow. You understand an allegory just by thinking about Pilgrim's Progress and John Bunyan and the plot of the book and the destinations and the cities and the slew of despond and all the rest of it. This is an allegory where the story is put for.

In a metaphor, there is an image that is put for something else. And we have much more of the idea here of a comparison or of a suggestion that as with Ephesians chapter four, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. It is a sacrificial, beneficial love, but it has constraints.

It is part of something much bigger than itself and only finds its truest expression, its deepest meaning, and its avenue of fulfillment in that context. So this is where the book is going to take us. And it's not necessarily, it is certainly not allegorical.

It's not even necessarily typological. Some people see it as a type. These are types and they're foreshadowings, they're adabratons of Christ and the church.

The problem is there just is no, the only reason people struggle for these interpretive avenues is they're uncomfortable with the basic content of the book and they have to find a way to justify it rather than taking the content at face value and saying, God put this here for a reason and let's look at it at face value rather than trying to say, I can give you an example I found somewhere where they've actually even retranslated the book to say something completely different. So if you look at your chapter one, take Song of Solomon chapter one there, right at the beginning, our Bible says the song of songs, which is Solomon's. And then you have this young lady saying, let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth that your love is better than wine and so on.

Well, this one says, the song that excels all songs dedicated to God, the King to whom peace belongs. And now their label here, where you have the Shulamite, they have Israel in exile to God. Communicate your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness for your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights.

Now, if you're reading along verse two, just try that again. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love is better than wine becomes Israel in exile talking to God saying, communicate your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness for your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights. Then verse three, like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of your great deeds.

Your very name is flowing oil. Therefore have nations loved you. It just goes downhill from there.

This is what happens when you try to press a preconception on a text that does a beautiful job of

just speaking for itself if we let it. So once again, I've given you the, what I think is the structure, these 14 songs and they do progress and they do tell a story, but it's not the kind of story that suggests an allegory. It is the kind of story that suggests the proper course of romance between a man and a woman culminating in marriage and consummation and then the immediate aftermath.

And this is dear to a woman's heart. You know, all of the figures of speech and all of the allusions that have been made to the dreams, you know, the hope chest and all the stuff that's in it. And where is my knight in shining armor that's going to come sweep me off my feet and carry me off to the castle and so on.

Well, this is your book. But there's plenty here for men and it doesn't matter if you've been married for ages or if you're still seeing that in prospect in your future. This book in focusing on the initiation of the marriage relationship is like unto the New Testament.

You read Paul's letters, talking about the initiation of our faith in Christ and this becomes the model and the teaching foundation on which all of our subsequent life of faith is based. Well, it's similar. It's similar here.

This predates what Paul does, but it's similar. By focusing on this essential time of forging in great heat, some cases, this relationship, it shows us what is going to sustain it and maintain it throughout its earthly existence. So that's our overall approach.

This is going to be our perspective. And we are not going to find in the same way that in Esther, people have tried to read something into the threshing floor scene that, you know, or Ruth, I'm sorry, Ruth with the threshing floor scene with Boaz and that something untoward took place. In the ancient Near East, we're going to find in our cultural context that there were certain things that were permitted and there were certain things that were not.

And this story is going to follow those right down the line. There is nothing out of line in the course of this entire story. And I'm also going to call attention to some other interesting foreshadowing elements in terms of the space of time that this story covers that will be pregnant with meaning for the future.

Yes, I know I shouldn't have stretched my point that far, but you'll see when we get there why I say that. So let's begin here at the beginning and look at the first song, which is the arrival verses one through eight of the first chapter. And I'm going to read you the translation offered here in the commentary that I commended to our attention just to give you in the same way that I read you the bad one, I wanna read you a good one.

So Michael Goulder is who I'm trying to get to here. And so this is Solomon's song of songs. And this is shir ha, this is song of songs in Hebrew, it's the very thing, but in that construction, it means this is the best song.

You could easily translate this Solomon's best song. We are told that Solomon wrote a lot of songs and this says it's basically, it's the song that excels all of his other songs. Now we're going to have this princess speaking.

We know this because of the gender of the pronouns and the subject matter. It's not hard to figure out who is speaking. So we're going to start with, we can call her the Shulamite as it does in your text.

That's easy. She's referred to that later on by that name. So this is what she says, with his mouth, let him kiss me with kisses.

For better than wine is your loving and rich of scent are your ointments. Even your name is ointment of gold. That is why the girls love you.

How many popular songs can you think of that have alluded to that? So your name is ointment poured forth and the virgins love you. They find him attractive. He's the dream guy.

He would be on the pages of 16 magazine or something if it existed in those days. Then verse four, where it says in your King James, New King James, draw me away. The idea here is summon me of all of these adoring girls.

I want you to call my name. Summon me after you. We will come running for now that the King has brought me into his halls.

You shall be our joy and our gladness. And you get the idea that there is a retinue. She's a princess and she's got some other girls with her.

And they are all of the same opinion that she is a very blessed girl to have caught the attention of the King and to be called. And this is why she's speaking in the plural. The King has brought me into his halls and this is third person, really second person.

You remember when Esther was talking to the King and she refers to him in the third person a lot of times. Same thing here. Summon me after you.

We will come running for now that the King has brought me into his halls. You shall be our joy and our gladness. More than of wine will we tell of your love for more than handsome, you do they love.

Now in verse five, she says, I am dark, but lovely. Oh, daughters of Zion, dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as Solomon's curtains. Stare at me, not though I am darkened that the sun has beheld me.

Hot with me too were my mother's sons and made me a worker out in the vineyards at home. My vineyard, my own have I worked not. I didn't have my own vineyard to work.

I worked the family vineyard and I was out in the sun. This is why I'm dark. By the way, if you remember in Isaiah 14, 12, I believe it is, where how thou art fallen from heaven.

Oh, Lucifer, son of the morning or son of the dawn you find in translations. And I've mentioned to you several times in the past in our previous studies, that the word there is Shakar, S-H-A-C-H-A-R, Shakar, S-H-A-C-H-A-R. And my suggestion to you is that what it really says there is how you are fallen from heaven.

Oh, shining one, son of darkness. And one of the reasons I believe that is this verse. I am Shakar, but lovely.

So don't stare at me is the idea. And think badly of me because I am dark. You know, there was a time a couple of hundred years ago where girls would actually take arsenic and stuff to make themselves pale.

And they would wear parasol, use parasols and wear hats, wide brims and everything. And stay out of the sun at all costs because white skin was the most desirable. And they would powder themselves and just look as pale as ghosts.

Well, this is the thought that even in the ancient day to be dark and to be sunburnt was to be of the laboring class, of the common class. And so she says, don't stare at me because I am dark. I am Shakar.

It's a form of the same word that's used in the passage about the shining one having fallen. Because the sun has tanned me. Dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as Solomon's curtains.

My mother's sons, these of course are her brothers and were making her a worker out in the vineyard. And she says, my own vineyard I have not kept. I wasn't doing it for myself.

Essentially this was not by choice. If she had her own vineyard, she might've had workers she could send, but she was working in a vineyard that belonged to others. So then in verse seven, tell me, you whom my soul is in love with, where do you pasture? Where do you make to lie down at noon? Lest I become like a woman in veils by the flocks of your comrades.

Well, then the chorus says, follow the track. If you don't know the way, oh, fairest of women, that the flocks have trodden and feed your kids by the tent of the shepherds. So what have we seen so far? Because this is our first song where she concludes, if you do not know, oh, fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents.

So the chorus concludes this first song. So what are we seeing here? There is an attractive, universally admired young man that the girls are sort of infatuated with, and she would love for this guy to call her name, and he does. Draw me away, summon me to your presence.

And then she says, when the daughters basically say, we will run after you, you see that in verse

four, and she says, the king has brought me to his chambers. This is her introduction to the court. She's been brought to the palace, and she is dazzled with the riches.

And the way I take her question in verse seven, oh, you whom I love, where do you feed your flock? Where do you make it rest at noon? And why should I be like the girls who follow other shepherds and other flocks? It's a tongue-in-cheek question because, of course, he's the king. He's as far removed from a shepherd as he can be, and yet, what's the story of his father? David went from being a shepherd to being the king, and one of the reason he had such great qualities as a king is he started out as a shepherd, and God said, I will take you and make you the shepherd of my people, Israel. So she is aware of Solomon's parentage.

She's aware of his heritage, and so tell me, oh, you whom I love, where do you pasture, where are the flocks that you feed? Well, of course, these are the people of Israel, and this is his employment. This is his occupation. This is what his calling and function is, and so she is not only admiring him as a person, but she wants to know about his drive, his motivation.

What is it that he does? This goes all the way back to the third chapter of Genesis. The man has got to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and his help meat is going to be managing the household, raising children, and supporting the husband. It isn't a denigration.

It isn't subservient. It isn't some sort of a lesser role. Ask any officer in the military services if he thinks that officers are better, more useful than enlisted.

They are complementary roles. No officer can get anything done if there aren't wonderful enlisted people who know how to do their job. It's a difference in function.

It's the difference between administration and execution. It's the difference between planning and doing. It's the difference between being responsible for the strategy and carrying it out in an effective, professional, and successful way, and one without the other is useless.

This is left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. One without the other hops along and eventually stumbles and falls. And the analogy that I've suggested before is you think about the priesthood in Israel.

Were the sons of Levi any better than the sons of the other 12 tribes in Israel? They weren't. They were assigned a function, and being a priest was no higher or better than being a member of any other tribe, but it had a unique function. Any given spiritual gift is valuable because the Lord designed it, the Lord assigned it, the Lord is gonna give areas for it to function.

And in some cases, the ones that seem lesser are given the greater honor. And you can go to Paul where he talks about, we pay more attention and take more care with some of the ones that seem to be less presentable because they actually have the greater honor. So this is the idea here.

She's not only dazzled by him, and he's an object of infatuation for a lot of girls, but he has called her name and has brought her to his courts and she's interested in what he does. What are these flocks? How do you manage them? When do you rest? This looks like a job that would take all your time. And behind that is the idea, are you going to have any time for me? Will you be able to balance these ideas? My brothers had a vineyard and had me working in them, so I understand how my brothers had to look at the vineyard and figure out how to administrate and where to use people in them and how to bring in the fruit.

So you, verse seven, with whom my soul is in love, how do you operate your business? Do you do it all the time? Do you rest at noon? I don't want to be one of these girls that camps on the edge of other shepherds with their flocks and isn't involved and doesn't know what's going on. I don't want to be one of those. I, my desire is to have a relationship where we share everything and I can be a useful component and concomitant and partner in the calling that you have, just as I don't want to be on the outskirts of a shepherd camp, I want to be more than that.

And so this is why in verse eight, the chorus sort of answers and says, if you don't know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock and feed your little goats beside the shepherd's tents. What's the idea here? Look at what's going on in the palace, familiarize yourself, don't just be focused solely on Solomon, but look at the operation of the court. This is shepherds plural and he's got under administrators in the same way that your brothers divided responsibility and used you in the growing of these vineyards.

Find out, spend a little time with the people who are implementing Solomon's policies, his advisors, his counselors, his cabinet. You can't just ask him all the questions, you can go out and gain some experience on your own in this area. And what does this do? It broadens your area of commonality, of concourse, of converse.

You can converse and you can speak intelligently about what he does because you've observed and learned some things and you can come with intelligent questions because you've detached yourself from your fascination to learn about what he does and how he does it. When does he rest? Who does he, how does he accomplish the shepherding of this flock, which is in fact the nation of Israel? And so she is going to begin to equip herself to be an intelligent and useful, functional queen in Israel, right? So that's the idea. So this is a sample, this first song helps us see that this is going to be practical guidance in how to manage romance, how to engage in intimate physical love as well as spiritual and emotional love.

And it is healthy, it is designed by God, it isn't something to avoid, it isn't something to be embarrassed about, it isn't something that people shouldn't discuss or understand, it shouldn't be looked at as kind of a sort of a shameful thing because of all of the many abuses of it outside of marriage and outside of God's moral standards. It is a wonderful, healthy gift. And it is a context in which the developing of lifelong relationship is going to begin.

Many, many marriages begin with this passionate fascination where you just can't bear to be apart. And that's where the Song of Solomon is going to begin. But its counsel is, that's great.

But as you are enjoying this time of just absolute preoccupation with one another, here are some ways you can channel that enthusiasm and that energy and that interest into productive areas that are going to flesh out and develop and deepen this relationship. So that's the first song. I have a couple of more things to say about it next time, but it sets the tone and gives us the pattern for the other 13 songs that are going to follow.

And we're going to see that each of them has these elements of wisdom and counsel and guidance and gives us something to think about. You can easily get wrapped up in the early dazzling romance and literally sort of lose your head. You just can't think straight.

This is the subject of songs and stories. When I was doing medieval literature, they had the swooning swain who was forever leaning up against a tree in the grip of melancholy and couldn't do a job and couldn't focus or concentrate. He was just completely enamored and couldn't get anywhere.

As with so many other areas of life, God is going to give us practical steps to enjoy that wonderful initial phase of man-woman relationship, but at the same time, take practical steps and functional steps to get it off on the right foot and to nurture it and develop it and enjoy it in the context of God's plan and purpose for the married couple who are eventually going to find a more enduring and slightly less frantically preoccupied mode of coexistence. But the Bible is not against being dazzled and enamored and just completely occupied with this person that you find such soul compatibility with. And this book celebrates that facet.

It is a God-given gift. It is a blessing. And you have a manual here on how to enjoy it, exploit it, and not get tripped up and distracted to the point of failure by it.

So we're going to move rather expeditiously through the book, and we're going to see some wonderful nuggets of truth buried along the way for each phase from meeting and realizing that this person is a candidate for a long-term relationship all the way through marriage and into the early phase of married life. But we are also going to find that it is going to reflect on our Christian existence, our Christian experience in relationship with God through Christ, and that the same things that first drew us and convinced us and persuaded us of the reality of Christ and His work on the cross on our behalf and bringing us to the Father, that that excitement and that initial energy and enthusiasm that we had is something that can continue throughout our Christian life and inform everything that we do from then on. So while it is not an allegory, it is definitely going to illuminate as so many parallel things in God's plan and God's word do our own Christian walk and experience.

And so we'll be looking forward to that in the days ahead, but it's time for us to stop for this

evening. Let's close with a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the inspiration of the scriptures, your preservation of them for us across centuries, and they are just as alive and vital and meaningful and applicable now as they were when they were originating in the minds and the hearts of the prophets and the apostles and in the spoken teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself.

We pray that as we look at this portion of the Old Testament, that your Holy Spirit will minister to our hearts, help us to see its pertinence and applicability for our own lives. And as we look at the practical application of it in experience of romantic love and marriage, may we also find in it guidance and motivation for our spiritual walk as we anticipate the day when the Lord Jesus Christ calls us and summons us to His presence. And we begin that wonderful time of consummation and union with Him in your presence in His kingdom and in yours.

We pray all of these things in Jesus' name, amen.