

SongOfSolomon 20-01-23a

Welcome to the Thursday night Bible study at Grace and Truth. We're going to continue after a long interval, our study of the Song of Songs, the Song of Solomon, Canticles. It goes by many names, but one of the more unusual books in the Bible for a number of reasons.

And because it's been a few weeks, I'll quickly review the introduction that we undertook and then we will get into the book proper. Let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started. Father, what a truly humbling and awesome experience it is to come into your presence by prayer, to submit ourselves before your throne and to speak with you directly.

We enjoy these privileges because of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest who has made this possible. We're so thankful for him and for your plan that rescued us from a lost and hopeless condition. And by placing us in Christ has given us a unique future, a unique hope, wonderful blessings and the fulfillment of many precious promises that are founded on a new and better covenant.

We thank you that we have the ministry of your Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, to illuminate scripture, to help us not only understand it, but see its pertinence and how it applies when we face those circumstances and challenges that call for its use. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that the presentation will transcend the limitations of the presenter and that as we look together at this portion of your word, we will be blessed and find in it useful thoughts and a useful perspective for ourselves both now and for the future kingdoms to come. We pray these things in Jesus name.

Amen. If you have found your place in the song of Solomon, the first page of it directly after Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, you will remember that it has because of its unusual content been questioned, been interpreted in a number of different ways and it has been something of a great puzzle and challenge for two or three reasons. Even its place in the canon of inspired scripture in the list of books that we recognize as containing word from God has been questioned over the years and interestingly, the ancient Israelites and the early scribes and teachers of the law never questioned it.

They thought it was a great book and it never underwent any serious criticism or question in terms of being included in the scrolls that were kept in the temple and in the synagogues of the ancient Israelites and later the Jews. Never really seriously brought into question, but really beginning in the Middle Ages and the days of the Renaissance and the Reformation and the arising of your strict Puritan modes of thinking, its frank and often fairly erotic content was felt to be unworthy of God's Bible. It's too, too much.

This kind of stuff ought not to be talked about. And so even in days when bodily functions and

such were rendered literally into scripture, you can think of a few Old Testament passages with a very graphic description of males being counted and then they're rendered by what they were able to do against a wall. You have that in the original King James.

But over the years there became more and more of a prudish approach and trending and sliding from prudishness into priggishness into a sort of a excessive sensibility that made this a book not to be looked at. So that's one of the reasons we're looking at it is if it's a trendy thing to ignore it, then we probably ought to take a look. But let me just briefly remind you of various ways that the existence of this book in the canon has been, has been argued for or justified and what people thought it was there for and what they ought to do with it.

So the allegorical interpretation has been the most common in earlier days. This is the way the Israelite scribes and rabbis took it. They said, well, this is an allegory.

These pictures of intense passionate love are there because God is trying to tell us about the love relationship between himself and Israel. The problem with that is that we have unquestioned scripture that describes the relationship between God and Israel and it is not of this nature. Almost never.

Once in a while, you have the children of Israel on the far side of the sea looking back at the floating chariots of Pharaoh and singing to the Lord. But a couple of days later, they're making a golden calf. They can't sustain a theocracy.

Give us a king, Saul, David, Solomon, and before you can get two shakes of a lamb's tail, Solomon himself, the putative author of this book has accumulated thousands of wives and concubines and such. And he's the farthest thing in the world from fidelity and a picture of what God intended. So this allegory that the song of Solomon perhaps expresses the ideal of what the love should be between Israel and God and God and Israel just fails on all counts.

There's no clue in the book to suggest that it is a simile to God's love or a metaphor or any sort of a figurative depiction idealized or not of Israel and God. As you may remember from our introduction, God is never mentioned in this book at all. So later interpreters in the post Pentecost era, i.e. the age of the church, the Christian time said, well, I don't know what the Israelites did with it, but we see it as a picture of Christ in the church.

And we've got Paul in Ephesians four to stand on for that. Husbands love your eyes as Christ loved the church, gave himself for it. He's the head of all things to the body and so on.

Ephesians chapter one. Once again, this is any allegorical interpretation where you choose to take one thing to mean another with little to no support in scripture is basically eisegesis. You are reading into the text something that isn't there.

If it was supposed to be a picture of love of Christ for the church, why didn't it come from the pen

of an apostle or the Emanuels of an apostle and be put in the new Testament? Why did Israel have it for a thousand years? If Solomon wrote it, and I believe he did, why did Israel have it for a thousand years? What's, what's the point? What's the purpose? Additionally, the allegorical approach and the reason I'm going through this and reminding you of it is my strong suggestion to you is don't take the book this way and don't let somebody else try to tell you that's what the book is. I really, really don't think so. I hand to the Lord.

Everybody's got to do their best to interpret as they see fit. And if you really, really see that in it, go be warm, be fed. But I don't see it.

I don't think you can justify it. And as we go through the content in sort of block form, I think you will see why. I think it has another better biblical purpose than that.

We have plenty of descriptions of God's patience with Israel, his willingness to take them back when they have strayed. We don't really need a book depicting what it ought to have been and wasn't. There, there is too much, uh, graphic portrayal of physical attraction and physical love in this book for to try to spiritualize all of that.

You just wind up doing so many gymnastics. Same thing with Christ and the church. It does not work.

You have all kinds of problems with application. Ask yourself, okay, song of Solomon with all these, uh, places where you have fairly explicit imagery occurring. So what, what am I supposed to do with that in my Christian walk? Well, it fails on that point, just as it would fail for Israel and trying to work some application out of that, uh, other allegorical interpretations.

They said, well, it's the individual believer. It's, it's not Israel or the church as corporate groups. It's the individual believer.

And this ought to be the sort of hugely intimate. Uh, I mean, there's really no getting around it. If you just read this book and read it through a few times, uh, of the various, you know, the five different Greek words for love, you've got a gap, a, you've got Philos, uh, you've got Eros from which we get the word erotic.

Well, there is a fair helping of Eros in this book. You can't escape it. You can't explain it away.

It's there. And the question isn't, is it there? But why is it there? Well, I don't think you can strain an allegorical interpretation and say, not only should we have Philadelphia and brotherly love for one another, and not only should we enjoy the agape love of God, that the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our heart, but we should have some sort of Eros, uh, between ourselves and God or between ourselves and Christ. I mean, it just, it gets weird.

So, I don't think you can make that work. I can't make it work. The other suggestions have been that it's actually talking about the Virgin Mary, that this is a, if you can believe it, you know, what,

what is conceived in you is of the Holy Ghost, that this is a preview of coming attractions and that, you know, this is a whole experience that the Virgin Mary had.

I mean, the no allegorical interpretation. Can I get to, to even roll much less fly? A variety of the allegorical interpretation is one I mentioned to you under a separate category, which is the liturgical use that this, this was read and celebrated at various feast times in Israel, which it was. Uh, there were times in the later history of Israel where they would read this during say the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Feast of Atonement or the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Booths.

This is one of the passages that they would read. Well, uh, I read somewhere that, that, uh, love songs might be used as a part of a, of a liturgical celebration, a religious festival. You might pull one of these in, but the festival doesn't generate love songs.

You wouldn't say, Oh, somebody was sitting around on the Day of Atonement and decided they would write the Song of Solomon. It doesn't explain its origin and its purpose. The fact that it was later incorporated doesn't mean that that's what it's for.

So that's really another allegory that, that it derived from a pre-Israelite Canaanite festival. Somebody dug up a set of inscriptions somewhere where Baal was depicted as a shepherd and went forth to have his way with human women in sort of a, you know, Greek God sort of a thing where you get the demigods and Hercules has Zeus for a father. And, you know, it just, none of that really, really flies.

You don't think of that in the same breath with scripture. So that's two, the allegorical and the liturgical, that this was somehow designed to be used in worship. How do you make that work? And again, you have an application problem.

If that's okay, you're going to bring this up on the Day of Atonement for what? If you're going to sing it on the Feast of Booths for what? It just dead ends. Another thought was that it was a drama and even the two most ancient witnesses to this that we have in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus, there are notations in the margin that are designed to be helpful in telling you this is the, this is the Shulamite speaking, this is Solomon or this is the shepherd or this is the chorus. People have tried to say this was sort of a play that was acted out and it's a script.

It's a drama and different speakers are going to speak. Now while that is true, you can discern that different people are going to speak and different viewpoints are going to be expressed. You have at least three perspectives in the book and I'll tell you which three we're going to adopt as we work through.

But there's no other precedent for this. Of course there's really no precedent for any of the supposed ways of interpreting it. You don't have allegorical books in the Old Testament.

You don't have liturgical books in the Old Testament and you don't have dramas. You don't have like Shakespearean plays in the Old Testament where people are supposed to get up there and act out the parts. So it's kind of a circular argument that it's a drama when you don't have any other dramas.

Same thing in terms of application. Suppose somebody did get up there and act this out and say these lines and strut and fret their hour on the stage. What is the audience supposed to take away from this? And it's a real difficulty.

Normally a drama, look at any good play by any good playwright and it has a plot. It has a movement toward a climax. There is a resolution of this problem or this conflict and then there is the aftermath.

None of that occurs in the Song of Solomon. There is no movement. There is no plot really.

There is no development. There is no resolution. You don't see somebody come to terms with a tragic flaw or consequences for bad decisions or outcomes for good.

It just there's no dramatic movement such as any piece of that nature would incorporate. Worse, if you decide as many have that there are three main characters besides the chorus, the daughters of Jerusalem who provide sort of a Greek chorus, they will respond or ask questions or whatever. Many people have said, well there's the Shulamite, the girl in question, this beautiful young lady.

There is Solomon and there is a guy called the Shepherd Lover and she's in love with the Shepherd Lover, but Solomon is trying to recruit her for his harem and she's saying, no, no, all of your allurements and such don't overcome my enthusiasm. Love for the Shepherd Lover. Well, who wrote the book? This is a book of Solomon, right? And we are led to believe that he wrote it.

And I like the quote I found somewhere where a guy said, it is most unlikely that Solomon, the apparent author of this production would have written up this episode as a monument to his own defeat in love. If, if the Shepherd Lover really does succeed, then all of Solomon's inducements and such fail. Why would Solomon write this all up? It's a, it's a monument to his failure in love and his defeat.

And anybody that does this has to really alter the text, has to reorder it, has to add things and the complexity of all that just really kind of rules it out. You just have to mangle the thing so much to get it to work as, as a drama where you have, that's the conflict between Solomon and the Shepherd Lover, but the Shepherd Lover, you know, true love, all the riches that content is not in the book. It's a nice idea, but it doesn't come from the book.

It doesn't fit the book. It doesn't work in the book. So all of that said, and I review those and I presented them in the first place because most of the time, if you say, Oh yeah, we did Song of

Solomon.

Let me go Google something on that. Let me read a commentary or here's a little short article or whatever. You'll find them falling into these categories.

And in my humble opinion, and it's very humble because this is a hard book to address. That's why I saved it for one of the last. But these fail, these fail and they miss the point.

There's always a point. I have found a few and I really had to dig. I have had to dig and scour the earth and listen to people and get really bad commentaries and, and just wade through.

That's one of the things I've been doing during this hiatus since our last lesson in Song of Solomon is just trying to cover as much as I could to see what seems to me to do justice to the book and to the word of God in general with this being a particular part of it. Here's my synthesis. Here is my conclusion.

This is summarized in a, an article. I'd have to look up to see who wrote it. This is Gleason Archer and I like Gleason Archer.

He's done things like the encyclopedia of Bible difficulties. And he's a very conservative biblical solid. Anything you read by Dr. Archer is going to be good.

But here's what he says. There's no denying that the Song of Solomon is different than the rest of the Bible. It doesn't have a doctrinal theme.

It expresses and depicts personal feelings. It's a book of feelings. This is how the gal feels about the object of her love and desire.

This is how the object of her love and desire speaks and feels about her. It's very intimate and it's very personal. It is not a doctrinal treatise.

It is not a narrative from which you can draw applicational value like you would in say, first Samuel or the gospels. It is not of that, it's not cut from that cloth. Its theme is the most exciting and uplifting of all emotions, the emotion of love.

And these are Dr. Archer's words. Love is that which knits two souls together into a larger unity, an organic partnership that responds to and reflects the love of God for his children and the love of Christ for his chosen bride, the church. Notice it is a reflection.

It is not an allegory or a metaphor of that love, but it reflects it. So the importance of this book is that it is about love, especially love between husband and wife as a paradigm. If you understand the love between husband and wife, this will give you insight into other kinds of love.

But it is not a depiction of that love. It's not an allegory for it. So the approach we're going to take because this is the Bible is that it is a depiction of married love.

Most interpreters think this is some sort of dalliance that it expresses and depicts people outside the bonds of wedlock doing very intimate things with and to each other. I don't think so. Why is that? Well, first of all, this is a woman's book.

This entire story is told from the viewpoint of the woman. And what a wonderful thing. Israel specifically and God in general in scripture has been accused of being patriarchal and diminishing women and making them subservient and a help meet and second place and subject to the husband and whatnot.

This book is a woman's story beginning to emerge. It's all basically from her perspective and it depicts in detail her very intimate feelings and observations and thoughts. Um, it is about marriage.

I suggest right on the title page of this book in your Bible, you got a little space where it says the song of Solomon. You got some blank space there. This is a book about married love.

The Bible itself is about marriage, is it not? Think about it. You can't get two chapters into Genesis before you have the first woman and the first man, one man, one woman. Adam sees her and says in Genesis two 23, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

God looks on that union and he says, therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh. Very next verse, the two shall become one marriage. The Bible, when you get to the history of humanity, it's one of the first things you hit.

Adam names the animals. Next thing you know, he's married to a female wife. Now in the next verse, you're tracking with me in two 23 bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, right? You're tracking in the next verse two 24 for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.

They too shall be one flesh. What does the next verse say? Genesis two 25. This is where the song of Solomon comes in.

They were both naked, the man and his wife and were not ashamed. The ideal in marriage represented in the physical side of the relationship is there is complete transparency. There is transparency of body, of soul, of heart, of mind, of spirit.

It is the closest that any two human beings can come and in its ideal form, there is no shame. I would suggest that as you annotate the top title page of song of Solomon, after you put, this is a book about married love, you put Genesis two 23 through 25. This is what the book is about.

It is the inexpressibly great, transparent union of a man and a woman in marriage and it is exciting. It is passionate. It is intimate and it is not ashamed.

The whole Bible is about marriage. You can go just a couple of more chapters and what is the first big attack on God's plan for humanity? What happens in the first few verses of Genesis chapter six, the sons of God, the angelic custodians who are helping the human race get off the ground, teach him about the wheel and fire and whatnot. What do they do? They take wives of all whom they chose.

It's an attack on the very fabric of what has been called divine establishment, the organizing principle, the glue that holds people together. This wittingly or unwittingly attacks right at the core. Genesis six starts out talking about illicit, misguided, badly motivated, wrongly executed marriage.

And from that comes such great wickedness that God's got to send the flood. From that comes the, imagination of men's hearts is only evil all the day. It starts with the erosion of marriage.

Look around you today. If you want some application, what happens when you dismiss the importance of marriage? Imaginations of men's hearts is only evil all the day. And they are now, there are places where they are actually trying to legalize pedophilia because as soon as you start legalizing one kind of corruption in marriage, where is the edge of the, it's not a cliff, it's a slope and it's just a gradual long day's journey into night.

But the Bible begins with marriage. The first great attack on humanity is implemented through corruption of marriage. How does the Bible end? What's in the last couple of chapters of Revelation? What is the new Jerusalem called? How is it described? Remember new Jerusalem coming down as a bride adorned for her husband, beginning to end.

The Bible is about marriage, not solely, but it starts with it. It's first great challenge includes it. Marriage is, is implicated in so many of the old Testament stories.

Paul talks about Christ in the church and compares the love that a husband has for his wife to the love that Christ has for his church. Marriages is in so many of Paul's epistles and continues all the way through as a picture and you find it at the end of the Revelation. So you, in Revelation 19, seven through nine, let us be glad and rejoice and give God glory.

For the marriage of the lamb has come and his wife has made herself ready and to her, it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright. The fine linen is the righteous acts of the sanctified. Then he said to me, right blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb.

The first place John shows us the Lord Jesus in John chapter two is where it's the wedding feast at Cana, turning the water into wine. You end with the depiction of the marriage of the lamb. The Bible is about marriage.

It highlights many of its central themes. A lot of the doctrines of the Bible are illustrated through

marriage. So you go to Isaiah chapter 62 verse four and you remember, there were names that were given to Judah and the Northern Kingdom as forsaken and desolate, but you shall no longer be called forsaken, nor shall your land anymore be termed desolate.

This is Isaiah 62 four, but you shall be called Hephzibah and your land Beulah, dwelling in Beulah land. Do you know why it's called Beulah? For the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married. That's what those two words mean.

Hephzibah and Beulah is delight and marriage. This is the future fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel and it's, it's described in terms of marriage. It looks to the time when Jerusalem and Judah, which are called forsaken and desolate will be renamed.

Hephzibah literally means my delight is in her and you find that delight explicitly described in so many passages of our book under study here, the Song of Solomon. Beulah means married. I'm dwelling in married land.

How many husbands can sing that song with enthusiasm? We hope it's all of us. Jesus depicts himself in parable after parable as the bridegroom, as the central figure at a wedding feast or a wedding celebration to which the father is inviting guests. Some people are in, some people are out who are the friends of the bridegroom who are the ones who celebrate while he's there.

But over and over again, he is the bridegroom. This is a part of marriage. Marriage.

Song of Solomon is no different. It is about marriage. So Matthew 9, 14 and 15, why do we in the Pharisees fast? The disciples of John are asking him, remember John the Baptist, his disciples went into this sort of ascetic mode and they were fasting and they said, the Pharisees fast, we're fasting.

How come your disciples aren't fasting? You remember his answer? And, and this is in all three synoptic gospels, by the way, it's Matthew 9, 14 and 15. It is Mark 2, 18 through 22. And it is Luke 5, 33 through 39.

Anytime the Bible tells you something, not once, not twice, but three times, it's important. What does Jesus say? Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast. There'll be come times of, uh, necessary fasting.

But Jesus pictures himself as the bridegroom. Matthew 25, 1 through 13, the kingdom of heaven, the 10 virgins, the five wise and five foolish with their lamps. That whole picture is a marriage scene.

And the wise and foolish virgins are not the bride. They're not the groom. They are those who are supposed to be there for the celebration.

So Matthew 25, 1 through 13, John 3, 29, he who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled.

John the Baptist, the reason for my commission, the reason for my birth that we saw at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew on Sunday has been fulfilled and I rejoice, but John calls him a bridegroom and it raises the question. Who's the bride? What is the nature of the marriage? What is this marriage depicting? What is it for? The apostle Paul, as I mentioned, uh, talks about, uh, our human marriages, uh, demonstrating and, uh, uh, picturing the nature of the love that Christ has for the church. And you go to Ephesians 5, 21 through 23.

Uh, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. And he's the savior of the body. Just as the church is subject to Christ, let wives be subject to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her. This is a multifaceted love. There are many aspects to the love that Christ has for us.

He loves the church as a, as a corporate entity. He is the head of that entity, but he also loves us individually and saves us individually. And, uh, there is an individual invitation for fellowship, the one who has my word and keeps it.

He is the one who loves me and I and my father will come to him and make our abode with him. So it's, it's multifaceted and there are a lot of facets. Uh, there is a duty component in marriage.

You have a responsibility. The husband has a responsibility for earning the bread by the sweat of his brow, uh, making provision protection, uh, nurture and encouragement, uh, discipline for children so that they are raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, uh, explaining heritage to children, such as is pictured in the old Testament. When you tack the word of the Lord to the doorpost so that it is an issue when you go out and when you come in, that is talking about applying the word of God to situations as you go out into the world.

And as you come back in from the world, fathers are to discuss this with your, with your children. The stones that Joshua took out of the middle of the Jordan river and piled as a memorial. What is the purpose of those stones? In later days when your children ask you what mean these stones, you can explain it, which means you need to know it yourself.

But this adds that component of children and offspring into, uh, marriage and those, those responsibilities. There are duties and fulfilling those duties is, is part of the law of love. There is the law of sacrifice, love that is sacrificial to self in order to benefit someone else.

And has that agape idea. Um, so all through the Bible you have marriage recurring as an

expression and as a typification, uh, not necessarily an allegory, but certainly a good illustration of, uh, biblical truths. So when you come to the song of Solomon, it shouldn't be a surprise to us that we find a beautiful and intimate expression of love within a marriage, love between a husband and wife.

Uh, so it isn't a worship ritual. It's not a liturgical chant. It isn't, uh, giving us commandments or statutes or ordinances to follow.

Um, it isn't really a hymn of praise to God. For providing marriage or providing a partner. Um, it doesn't contain prophecy.

It doesn't have an Oracle or a prediction. Uh, it is not the vision of a prophet like Daniel or a seer like Nathan. What is it? It is a personal woman's point of view, depiction of intimate married love.

And it's there for a reason. Now, having said that and having done my best to sort of document it as part of the fabric of scripture, where does the application come? And there are some of us who don't partake of marriage. Paul talks about this.

There are some people who are not married. Paul himself, he says, I have the right to lead about a wife, but I don't. Uh, there are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom and so on.

So if you're not married or if you don't have a prospect of marriage, then can you switch off and wait for the next Bible study series to make its appearance? Well, ask yourself this question. Are you a pre-flood human being? No. But do you study the scriptures that talk about conditions and things that pertained in the pre-flood era? Of course.

Are you an Old Testament Israelite marching along with Moses and later with Joshua and into the land and fighting the Canaanites and setting up the United Monarchy and living in the divided monarchy? Are you any of those? No, but we still study it because it has pertinence and applicability beyond its immediate target. Right? So just because we are either not yet married, don't think we're going to get married or used to be married and for whatever reason or not anymore, uh, or are awaiting reunion with our married partner doesn't change the pertinence and the applicability of this portion of scripture. It is every bit as pertinent to every single one of us, regardless of marital status.

And we'll see that as we go through. Um, so is this an important book for us to understand? Absolutely. Is it just as important and just as inspired and just as applicable as any other part of scripture, no matter what our status? Yes.

And we'll see that as we go through. So that's a review and an expansion of our introduction. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to take a look at a justification, at the evidence and the reason why we see this as a book about married love and try to answer the question. Well, so married

love is all intimate and full of these wonderful, uh, passionate occupation with one another, but so what? We'll see that when we come back.