

THE SONG OF SONGS



***Love is the neurosis
upon which the civilized world depends***

**Love is as strong as death, passion cruel as the grave;
it blazes up like a blazing fire, fiercer than any flame.
Many waters cannot quench love, no flood can sweep it away.
*Song of Songs 8:6-7***

Scripture:

Song of Songs 2 (selected verses)

Like A Lily Among Thorns

¹I am like a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. ²Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens. ³Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. ⁶His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. ⁸Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. ¹⁰My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. ¹¹See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. ¹²Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. ¹³The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me." ¹⁴My dove 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. ¹⁶My lover is mine and I am his....

John 3:16-17

God Loved

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.



**King Solomon, or the "King Solomon administration,"
is credited with writing three books of the Hebrew Scriptures.**

WISDOM LITERATURE

In the past four weeks, I have preached on four of the five books of Wisdom Literature from the Hebrew Scriptures. We began with Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Today, I'll conclude with the last of the five books - The Song of Songs (or The Song of Solomon).

From Job we learned how to suffer.

From the Psalms we learned how to pray.

From the Proverbs we learned how to act.

From Ecclesiastes we learned to reject the narcissism of the mundane and to enjoy the season we are in.

And today, from the world's most famous Love Song of the Old Testament, we learn how to love.

SONG OF SONGS

The Song of Songs is the story of romantic love, and eventually a marriage. It is a story of courtship and the lust of the body for another. It is probably more than wooing, dating, and making out, but it is absolutely not less.

The Song of Solomon reminds us that for many people their first glimpse of the power of God's love comes from the experience of the power of human affection. Romantic love may be prolog to agape love, that is charitable love, and "loving-kindness."

The troubadours are generally believed to be the authors of the first love songs in Europe. They are the 12th-century and 13th-century lyric poets in southern France, northern Italy, and northern Spain who composed songs in languages of the people, often about courtly love. I suppose troubadours are the ancestors of modern bluegrass musicians. Bluegrass bands sing songs about love, love on the rise, and love on the rocks. They are the most popular songs we sing.

The Song of Songs is the author's way of saying that the songs of courtship and love are the best songs of all songs: pure, romantic, embarrassing love songs. Love songs and love stories make the best movies, the best books, and the most popular records. I hope you all have a favorite.

WRITTEN IN WHICH ORDER?

So here is my question: When were the love songs written – in youth, in middle age, in maturity?

Remember that I began by saying there are three books attributed to Solomon. For the sake of argument, let's assume that Solomon wrote at least a part of each of the three books. In what order did he write them?

Here is a possible sequence.

- The love songs were written first. They describe a love experienced by adolescents and people in their twenties.
- Love songs are followed by the wisdom and anecdotes of the Proverbs,
- And finally the cynical book of Ecclesiastes, written at the end of his life, when Solomon realized that all of life is foolishness, except maybe for the part that relates to the study of God.

Is that the way you are writing the story of your life: from idealistic love, to little tidbits of clichés that you recall, and finally to cynicism about the whole process? Some say that is the story of Solomon and that is the story of human life.

ANOTHER SEQUENCE

But here's another sequence. Try this:

- The cynicism of youth came first, (foolish cynicism -- Ecclesiastes) and learning then, raging against the world into which you were born.
- Then comes some lessons of the Proverbs, (foolish wisdom). (I remember my friend, Jim Hinton, CEO of Presbyterian Healthcare in Albuquerque, New Mexico reminding board members, that "anecdotes are not data.")
- And finally, with maturity, reflections upon love itself – a window to God. To end the book of life, with love for the process, and the hope that it brings.

So are you still writing your love songs, or was that just an early stage to experience and then move on?

I rather like the second opinion. I'm living the second option. I'm more likely to tear up at a movie now than I was years ago. I can't really figure it out. But maybe I know more about the emotions than I did when they hit me for the first time.

LET ME REPEAT THE OPTIONS:

- The love songs that describe the hopeful, “all things are possible” love experienced by adolescents and people in their twenties.
- Followed by the wisdom and anecdotes of the Proverbs,
- And finally the cynicism, written at the end of his life, when Solomon realized that all of life is foolishness.

OR

- Foolish cynicism born of defeat and lack of skill.
- Giving way to anecdotes and Proverbs, (foolish wisdom)
- And finally, with maturity fond reflections upon love itself – a window to God – and the hope it brings.

THERE ARE EIGHT CHAPTERS TO THIS LITTLE BOOK:

CHAPTERS 1-2 are filled with mutual praise and longing between the lover and the beloved

CHAPTERS 3-6:3 - The bride's dream (3:1-5). The groom and his party approach (3:6-11). Praise for the beauty of the bride (4:11-5: 1). Description of the bride's dream (5:2-8). The bride and her friends discuss the groom (5:9-6:3)

CHAPTER 6:4-8:14 - The groom extols the beauty of his bride (6:4-13). Expressions of praise and longing between the bride and groom (7:1-84). The dream gives way to reality (8:5). Concluding passage (8-14).

It has been argued over the centuries that this book has no place in the Bible.

One Bible commentator said: Readers are ...invariably astonished to discover that such sexually provocative language and imagery can be found in the Bible. Contained in the eight brief chapters of this little-read book are some very titillating romantic speeches, love, passion, desire and longing. They can hardly be matched by classical secular romance writings...in stark

contradiction to the portion of the Bible...where human sexuality in general is regarded as requiring careful governing.

And another critic reminds us: Because the Song of Solomon nowhere makes mention of God or contains any religious or ethical ideas, its position in the Bible has long been debated. It has been the subject of criticism because it deals with human sexuality and dwells sensually on the physical attraction of the human body.

DO POEMS ABOUT LOVE SOUND TERRIBLE TO YOU?

With that kind of bad publicity, are you going to rush right home and read this little bombshell immediately! I want every one of you to read all eight chapters some time this week. Then you can decide for yourself if it belongs in your Bible.

CONSIDER WHAT THIS SCRIPTURE IS NOT:

- This is not love where there is a victim or a crime. This is not abusive love that works out all kinds of psychological sickness and maladjustment upon some passive victim -- wife, family member or acquaintance.
- This is not rape or violent love.
- This is not physical love that crosses the boundaries between adult and child.
- It's not prostitution nor is it perversion.
- This is not dependency love: I can't live without you. It is love with affection.

SO WE ASK:

Why should it be easier to talk about murder on the freeway than romantic love at home?

Why should we have more difficulty telling our children where babies come from than telling them not to talk with strangers, and not to answer the door, and to say, "Dad is busy," rather than say, "I am home alone"?

**Why is it that people are filled with hatred
for people who live differently,
and why is that worse than
crimes against life and property?**

ERIC FROMM: “Love is our most fundamental need.

“To find oneself caught up in the mystery, the beauty and personality of another person is one of life’s most wonderful experiences. And even if you are not caught up in that mystery, just to know it exists can make life worth living. Just to know that it’s out there. It is the most powerful force in the world.”

WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR LOVE?

Here are some things I have heard of:

“I gave up drinking and the use of drugs because my girlfriend wanted me to do it.”

“I’m staying in college and getting my degree. I’m not really into college right now, personally, but I know she’s right and I love her.”

“How about we skip tonight’s meeting, and have dinner together?”

“I know it’s expensive, and we don’t have the money, but let’s buy the tickets anyway and get our family together for the weekend.”

MATURE LOVE REMEMBERS

I remember a woman told me that she missed her husband. She was a woman well into her retirement years, and we have gone to basketball games with her. Her husband died recently. She told me that he had been crippled, and receiving a variety of medications and therapies in the last five years of his life. But she missed him terribly. She missed the young man with whom she had born children. She missed the guy who had lost some money in Las Vegas, and lost some more money on their first house, and she missed even the hard times with their children. And all of this was more than balanced by joys of life together. God I miss him. It was her mature love that made her miss the romantic love. And in all of this she was so grateful for their life together.

SELF LOVE

To have that sense of one’s intrinsic worth, which constitutes self respect, is, potentially, to have everything. – Joan Didion



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