

A Stunning Invitation to Marriage

Hello again & welcome to *Voice of the Church*; I'm Pastor Ryan Swale, & today we're gonna look at Song of Songs chapter 2, specifically verses 8 through 17. What's been called one of the loveliest poems in all the world's literature. In Ch. 1 v. 2 through Ch. 2 v. 7 we have a king & rather unassuming country-girl singing of their desire for one another. And, now, at the end of Ch. 2, he gives this "stunning invitation."

It says, "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks & says to me: 'Arise, my love, my beautiful one, & come away, for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over & gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, & the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, & the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, & come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, & your face is lovely.' 'Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. Until the day breathes & the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be as a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains.'"

Martin Luther once compared the gospel to a royal-marriage where "a rich & divine bridegroom takes a poor [undeserving] girl & adorns her with his goodness..." Luther said, "He takes upon himself the things that are *hers*, & bestows upon *her* the things that are *his*..." Condescending to join her to himself that she might be able to say, "My beloved is mine, & I am his..." And that royal condescension by which such an invitation is given is the *theme* of the passage we just read. A royal bridegroom condescends – "leaping over the mountains," "skipping over the hills" – to invite this unassuming, country girl to whom we're introduced in Ch. 1, to be his bride... So that, by the end of the passage, she might be able to say, "My beloved is mine, & I am his..."

There is an unfolding plot in this song: where the first movement in Ch. 1, v. 2 to 2, v. 7 is one of *desire* – of *anticipation & longing* to be together; by the time we get to Chapters 3 & 4, the king arrives on his wedding day & the marriage will be consummated; but *here*'s the request, the *proposal*, the "stunning invitation" to see the king arrive on his wedding day & enjoy that sweet consummation, being united with him in love...

Look with me first at the king's *coming* in vv. 8 & 9; then the king's *call* in vv. 10-16; & the king's coming *again* in v. 17... The bride-to-be *rejoices* in v. 8 at the *voice* of her beloved, she rejoices at his coming: "*Behold he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over hills!*" He's described as *running* to pursue his bride-to-be with the *speed* of a gazelle, leaping over the mountains, excited to see her; nothing can stop him from pursuing her. He's committed & determined to find her in the country-home of her mother & brother behind that "wall" in v. 9.

He comes longing. Comes *looking* through the window, *gazing* through the lattice. Desiring to see the one he loves... And then the bride-to-be describes his words, the "call" of the bridegroom. He says, "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, & come away... For winter is past, the rain is over & gone; spring is upon is, flowers are blooming, birds are singing; *love is in the air.*" And then he says again, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

In case we missed the actual request in all the metaphor & poetry, he says it a 2nd time: "**Come away with me...**" This is a request for the bride-to-be's hand in marriage..." It's language of "leaving & cleaving." *Come away with me!* The flowers are emerging from the soil, birds are emerging with their song, yet, there's one thing that's not yet emerged, but remains in the cleft of the rock... Verse 14, she's hiding "in the crannies of the cliff." And the King *longs* to see her; longs to hear her voice.

He praises her beauty; praises her voice which is sweet; invites her to "leave & cleave," & "come away" to join him in marriage. Leaving the house of her mother to establish a new home. And, as they look to establish that new home, he calls her a word we don't see in the English, but when he calls her 'my love' it has the idea of "friend." It's term of *endearment*, implying *affection & heartfelt companionship*. "One of the highest expressions of love & praise, when a husband simply calls his wife *friend*." He's not *objectifying* her, but *dignifying* her... Not viewing her as less than, but equal. As in that line often ascribed to Matthew Henry: "Eve was not taken out of Adam's head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his *side* to be equal, under his *arm* to be protected, & near to his *heart* to be loved." This idealized king in the Song of Songs understands what it means to love his bride-to-be. He's ready to enact 1 Peter 3:7, "living with his wife in an understanding way, & showing her *honor*."

And after one of them says there are foxes that need to be caught, threats to the blossoming of their relationship, the bride finally says in v. 16, “My beloved is mine & I am his.” Echoing the covenant-formula throughout the Bible, “I will be your God & you will be my people.” The Song deliberately echoes the language of the covenant of grace, because marriage is designed by God as a *picture* of the covenant of grace!

And that’s why they say in v. 15 there are foxes that need to be caught: anything that may hinder their marriage relationship. And the reason these things need to be caught is because of what marriage depicts: the *mutual belonging, exclusivity, safety, love, & joy* of belonging to Christ!

That’s why it’s so important to “tend to the foxes,” because a spoiled marital-vineyard that ignores them may distort the gospel-picture marriage is meant to paint... This mutual belonging & utter delight where each gives themselves to the other, loving them “as their own body” pictures the union Luther spoke of... Where “the rich & divine bride-groom takes a poor [undeserving] bride & adorns her with his goodness. Takes on himself all that is hers, & bestows on her all that is his.” *Is that not what Christ has done with us in the gospel?* “My beloved is mine, & I am his.” His righteousness, his glory, his Father, all are mine... My sin, my guilt, my shame, all are *his*...

We’re united together in mutual delight... He gives himself to us; gives us his body, & we entrust ourselves to him, saying, “I am *not my own*, but belong body & soul, in life & in death, to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ, who’s fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood.” That joyous confession of the bride in v. 16 is to be ours. The church’s confession *corporately* as the bride of Christ. But also the individual confession that *every person must make!* Delighting in belonging to him, & then in v. 17, longing for his return. That’s what this song is calling us to: it lifts our eyes heavenward!

And, if you’re listening today & you’ve not made that confession – you don’t long for the king, you don’t know the joy of belonging to him – the invitation of the king for the bride is Christ’s invitation to you: “Come away, my beautiful one, my friend!” The friend of sinners is proposing nothing less than eternal marriage... And the most important thing you could ever do is respond to his overture of grace & say, “My beloved is mine & I am his... I am not my own but belong body & soul, in life & in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Hear the king calling, & answer..... Until next time... Thanks for joining us, & may God bless you.