

What Do We Do with the Song of Songs?

Hello, and welcome to *Voice of the Church*. I'm Pastor Ryan Swale, & I hope, over the next few weeks to think about the Song of Songs, or "Song of Solomon." Beginning today with Ch. 1 v. 1, where it says, "*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*" I've been preaching through this in the church I pastor, & more than once, people have said, "I've never known what to do with this book." Well, it helps if we start with this 1st verse that introduces it... And, so, as we ask the question, "What do we do with the Song of Songs?" I want to draw a few things out of this opening verse.

First, notice it's a *song*. This tells us something about literary genre. It's poetry. It's not a step-by-step-manual for 'marital-technique,' or historical catalogue of Solomon's love-life, but a *poem*, drawing us into the drama... Not given first of all to *inform* but to make us *feel*. To evoke the imagination, the affections – to the "draw us in" to the drama... And I say "drama," because this book is not a collection of unrelated poems, but a single, unified song, where we are drawn in to watch the story unfold from *anticipation* to *consummation* to *conflict & reconciliation*. There's a flow to the poetry: it's a song, & a unified song.

And this song is also a "Scriptural" song; that's the 2nd thing we see. It's different than the kinds of songs you hear on the radio, but inspired by God & placed in the middle of our Bible which *begins* in Genesis 2 with a marriage & *ends* in Revelation 19 with a marriage... This is the soundtrack of the story of redemption... The Bible tells a story of God wedding a people to his Son, & this book *sings* that song. That's how the church has always read it. It's a "Scriptural" song. That's also why there are Scriptural themes woven throughout it: gardens, vineyards, a shepherd & king, the city of Zion, the covenant-refrain: "I am my beloved's & my beloved is mine" which sounds a bit like, "I will be your God & you will be my people..." Scriptural themes *abound!*

Which leads to a 3rd observation: it is a Solomonic Song. Verse 1 says its "of Solomon." Who's referred to in v. 4 as the *king*, who *dwells* in Jerusalem & is called a "shepherd" in v. 7 & 8 because that's how the Davidic king is designated in the Bible. He's explicitly referred to in 3:11, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, & see *King Solomon*, on the day of his wedding..." This song is Solomonic. It's about David's Son. And that's a *key* to understanding the book. Because the Messianic bridegroom in the Bible is *also* the Son of David, promised in 2 Sam 7. This poetic depiction of Solomon, who Matt. 12 says is a type of Christ, points us to Jesus.

This is not *allegory*; it's *typology*... It's not skipping over the historical context of the song; but recognizing the context as that of David's royal son with whom the covenant of grace is bound up, & interpreting these Scriptural themes within the unfolding drama of redemption... It's recognizing that, as *poetry*, this song is *evocative*, & points *beyond* Solomon to a hero who is typified in this book... Whose beauty & loving care for his bride are pre-figured in this song, whose union with us in that garden-city to come is pre-figured in the garden-imagery throughout... This book is far more than a manual for marriage or a detailed description of Solomon's love-life; but is a poetic portrayal of the Eden-like intimacy that'll exist between Solomon's son, the royal bridegroom, & his bride...

And that Eden-like intimacy, that love beyond compare, *is* the greatest thing we could ever contemplate, the greatest theme we could ever sing of... Which is exactly what we're told in the title. The book is NOT called the Song of *Solomon*, but the Song of *Songs*. In other words, the *greatest* song. The "*superlative*" song, the song of which nothing better could be sung...

Of the 1,005 songs the Bible says Solomon wrote, ***this is his #1 hit***. Of all the songs in the Bible – the Song of Moses, the Song of Mary, the Song of Deborah or Hannah, the Psalms of David – of all the songs in the Bible, this one is called the *superlative* song... That's the 4th thing we see in this opening verse: it is the superlative song... Just as we speak of the most holy place as the "*holy of holies*." Or the greatest king as "*king of kings*," the opening verse of the song uses the superlative to describe this song!

Jonathan Edwards said the name by which Solomon calls it confirms that it's more than an ordinary love song, but a *divine* song of divine authority. For we read in 1 Kings 4 that Solomon's songs were 1,005. [But] this he calls the '*song of songs*,' that is, the most excellent of all his songs... For it's a song of the most excellent subject, treating the love, union, & communion between Christ & his bride, of which marriage & conjugal love is but a shadow.

There is a tendency among modern scholars, in a desire to be *relevant* in our age of sexual chaos, not only to ignore the history of interpretation that sees this book as speaking of gospel-realities, but *also* to rush past the introductory verse of 1 v. 1 which *calls* it the greatest song... If this is the greatest song in the Bible, would it not be ***odd*** for it *only* to be about sex...? (Not to say it has nothing to do with that, or has nothing to say to the sexual chaos all around us.) *But this song is in the Bible*; it's about David's Son; it's about a Garden...

And is therefore, about the union & communion that'll exist forever in that Eden-like-garden between the Son of David & his beloved bride... It's a song about the greatest love-story, after which every good love-story & love-song are patterned, because the feelings of love & beauty of marriage that God has given as gifts are signs of something greater...

Which is what the book concludes by telling us. Song of Songs 8, v. 6: "Love is strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave, its flashes are flames of fire, **the very flame of Yahweh.**" The book ends by telling us human love points *beyond* itself to the Lord of love, who unites himself to his people in marital-bliss! And it's precisely in that way that this book has *everything* to say to the sexual chaos all around us! We go into battle *under-armed & un-equipped* if we make this song only about sex & not about Christ, because we miss the fact that what makes the sexual chaos all around us so wrong is that it ruins the gospel-story that marital-love is meant to tell.

Not only is this book a song. Not only is it a Scriptural song, & a Solomonic song, the *superlative* song that sings the most excellent of all subjects. But as we look at the gospel-content of this song, it confronts the various distortions of marital-love we see all around us... And, so, the last thing we see is that this song is a "sage song;" it has *wisdom* for us! That's why it's found in the section of the Bible called *Wisdom Literature*. Because it teaches us how to enjoy the gifts of sex and marriage in a way that is patterned after the heavenly reality of the Son of David & his bride.

It teaches us sex is a good thing given by God, not a dirty thing to be ashamed of. It teaches us it's to be reserved for *marriage*... It teaches us not to stir up or awaken it *until* marriage. It teaches us that marriage is covenantal & binding, 'til death do us part; that it's heterosexual & monogamous, a *male & female* differentiated union. It arms us for the battles of our day... It speaks to pornography & the dangers of not pursuing purity... In all of this, it models for us the way things *should* be & exposes far how we fall short. And, therefore, need the bridegroom of heaven of whom this song sings who pursues us despite our sin & gives us his righteousness in that holy union that marriage depicts. And, so, if you're listening today, I invite you to consider how this song sings the gospel of our Lord Jesus, how it shows us the way things ought to be, & the *reason* why we need him: to heal our sexual brokenness & sin & be given his righteousness by faith... That's the love that this Song sings... Thanks for listening, & may God bless you.