

The Song of Songs

Part 1 - Preparing a Bride Adorned in Love

I. The Song of Songs

1. The Song of Songs has been one of the more misunderstood books in recent history. Many are not sure what to do with it and so it has been neglected.
2. In the last 100 years many have taken an entirely naturalistic view of this book – meaning they read it simply as a depiction of natural love. Because of this, it has been relegated to marriage and premarital counseling, which is a valid application but an incomplete one.
3. In contrast, its most common interpretation for its 3000 year history is a spiritual application – that it speaks of God's love for His chosen people (the individual believer, the church as a whole, or the nation of Israel). The Jewish rabbis called it 'the holy of holies' and would take off their sandals to read it.
4. It is Solomon's (S 1:1), but it is God's. Solomon wrote the song, but God wrote the story. Solomon crafted a love song, God crafted love. Solomon wrote of the movement of the heart, God wrote the movements of the heart.
5. God is love (1 Jn 4:8) and love is of God (1 Jn 4:7). The revelation of love is the revelation of God.
1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
6. God is love – the fullness of it. And all true love is of God. Mankind did not invent romance or passion or desire, it is part of who we are as those created in the image of God.
7. Paul teaches the Ephesians that our model for marriage – the highest form of love that we know in human relationships – comes from the way that Christ relates to His church.
Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
8. It is the song of songs – the greatest of songs. It captures the great drama of all time – God pursuing, capturing and perfecting the human heart in love.

II. The Kingdom of Heaven is about a wedding

1. The kingdom of heaven is about the Father arranging a marriage for His Son. In a Jewish proposal, the father of the groom arranges 'the match' (Shiddukhin) and may send a servant or friend on his behalf to make the request. The bride must give her consent.
Matthew 22:2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son
2. The Law then requires that the father of the groom pay 'the bride price' (Mohar) reflecting the value of the bride.
John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

3. God promised in the book of Hosea that there would come a day when He would reveal Himself as a husband and not a master, and that this is how He would do it – paying the bride price for a people who had played the harlot.

Hosea 2:16 “ And it shall be, in that day,” Says the LORD, “ That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’

Hosea 3:1 Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” 2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, “You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you.”

4. God has betrothed us to Jesus by the blood of His Son. The betrothal (kiddushin) was sealed with the 'cup of acceptance'. The groom would offer a cup of wine to the bride. Her acceptance would indicate her acceptance of the betrothal.

Hosea 2:19 “ I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.

Matthew 26:27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

5. The groom would then leave to prepare the wedding chamber (Chuppah), and would not drink wine again until the wedding day.

John 14:2 In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Matthew 26:29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

6. The bride would enter into a time of preparation and waiting including washings (Mikveh), the wearing of a veil, undistracted devotion and great anticipation.

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

7. The bridegroom would then return at an unknown day and time (determined by his father) with his friends running ahead to announce his coming. The bride and her friends would be waiting and watching for his arrival. The friends were responsible to light the way for the bride's journey should he happen to come at night (**Matthew 25:1-13**).

8. The marriage would then be followed by a great feast.

Revelation 19:9 Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’”

9. And then a lifetime (eternity in our case) together.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

10. Where are we now? The cup has been offered, and to as many as have received Christ, the betrothal has been accepted. It's time for the bride to make herself ready. How do we do that? We've been equipped with two major gifts:

1. When a Jewish marriage was arranged there would be a written marriage contract (Ketubah) that would detail the bride price to be paid, the rights of the bride, assurance of provision for her needs and the promise of the groom's return for His bride.
2. The father would also give the bride a dowry (Shiluhim) that was a part of her inheritance and would equip her for her new life.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

III. Preparing a bride – applying the Song of Songs to God's eternal purpose

1. Interestingly enough, the place where the Song of Songs *has* found much use recently is in marriage seminars and premarital counseling. We're just that one small understanding away from really grasping its essential purpose for the body of Christ: we are a bride being prepared for a wedding day.
2. There is coming a day when the body of Christ will walk as a bride equally yoked with Jesus in love. The Father has promised His Son a bride, and He will not fail. There will be a body of believers who walk out the first commandment, who love God as He loves, who have made themselves ready as a bride.
3. Awakening wholehearted love is God's highest purpose for us. The Song of Songs is an allegorical depiction of that journey.
4. It gives us insight into the heart of God as the Bridegroom. God reveals Himself as a Bridegroom from Genesis to Revelation. He spoke it through the prophets and He put it on display in the gospels. Song of Songs has the highest concentration of that revelation and a unique way of presenting it that makes it more personal.
5. It gives us insight into our own hearts as the bride. God is the Mastermind behind the human heart. He knows its inner workings far better than we do. The story of how the human heart is won tells us a lot about our own heart.
6. It gives us insight into the journey of love – the process of the bride being made ready. Very rarely in Scripture do we get such a clear picture of what it looks like to walk with God – to journey into His heart. We can piece it together through God's interactions with men and with nations, His commands and His promises, but Song of Songs really lays out in clarity many of the seasons of our walk with God.

IV. Reading the Song of Songs

1. When meditating on allegorical passages of Scripture we want to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Allegories are not meant to impart theological truths as much as to highlight them and to present them in a way that makes them easy to understand and that grips our hearts.
2. It is a resource for expression – it uses language unlike anything seen in the rest of the Bible. We often say that the Bible is God's love letter to humanity – Song of Songs is the one portion of the Bible that is written in that language.

3. It is a resource for understanding – a picture is worth a thousand words. It helps us take the truths of Scripture and understand them in such a way that they touch our hearts and our lives.
4. In my opinion, it is best studied thematically – one theme at a time, not one word or verse at a time. The story (ie the characters and events) are an allegory – they're symbolic. The words themselves are not. We can find symbolic meanings for them, and as long as they're Scriptural truths that's fine, but primarily the words are meant to convey the story, and it's the story that carries the symbolism. If we're trying to get meaning out of each word the potential meanings are endless and the real message is often lost.

V. Applying the Song of Songs

1. One reason we meditate on God's love is because it's better than wine – it is incredibly enjoyable to look at and to meditate on. We were made to be satisfied by God's love.
2. The second reason we meditate on God's love is because it has the power to awaken love in us. God's highest purpose for the human heart is awakening voluntary, extravagant love. It's why He gave us free will. It's valuable enough to Him that He would count the negative effects of free will as nothing to gain this one thing. We were made to love God.
3. Our existence as created beings centers around these two desires of our Creator. We live to love Him and be loved by Him. To give Him pleasure and to take pleasure in Him.
4. In John 17, just before Jesus goes to the cross, we get to hear Him say what it is that He is looking for as a result.

John 17:20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, **that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.**”

5. In Matthew 26, again just before Jesus goes to the cross, we get to see a picture of it. **Matthew 26:6** And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. *[John 12 adds that she wiped His feet with her hair]* 8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.” 10 But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. 13 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”
6. Mary had a revelation of the extravagance of love that Jesus was about to demonstrate. And her response was to pour out extravagant love on Him. Jesus says that testimony has to be preached alongside the gospel. Alongside the preaching of what Jesus did at the cross, there has to be a preaching of how He desires us to respond to that demonstration of love.
7. Mary took God's love personally, and there is an invitation in the Song of Songs for us to do the same – it is Solomon's, it is God's, but it's also yours.