



Key Passage: Song of Songs 8:7

Key Thought: A love story that reminds us of the ultimate love story.

The gospel in Song of Songs

We should begin with the title. For many of us, the title is and forever will be “Song of Solomon.” Maybe you have seen a different title in some Bible and wondered if that change came from disagreements over authorship. It turns out the Hebrew title for the book is “Song of Songs.” In English we have “good,” “better,” and “best.” In Hebrew, you have “good,” and you have “3-times good” or “the good of the good.”

This means “the song to surpass all songs.” Do you remember the last line in the book *Princess Bride* by William Goldman? “Since the invention of the kiss there have been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind.” I wonder if he was reading the Song of Songs when he wrote that line.

And that brings me to my second introductory point. Besides asking about the title, the second most common question asked about this book can also be summarized by a *Princess Bride* line: “is this a kissing book?” In other words, is this really a PG-13 or worse book about sex stuck in the middle of my Bible, or this is an allegory about Christ and the Church? You already know what the answer is—it’s the answer that always

comes at the end of a question like this. The answer is Yes. But let's not get there too quickly.

Let's start with sex. I laugh out loud every time I remember this line from Patrick Mead—a preacher who lives up in the Nashville area. He said he was lecturing on the Song of Songs at one of our college lectureships suggesting that is precisely what the book is about. Sex. After he was finished, some preachers came up to speak with him. They had to lower their voices every time they got to the “s” word. “Don't you know? This is not a book about (whispering) ‘sex’, it's an allegory about Christ and the Church.”

“Oh really?” replied Patrick. In an allegory, all the details have a direct correlation to the thing being allegorized, right?” “That's correct,” they responded. “Ok,” said Patrick, “so, when he's drinking water out of her bellybutton, is that a story about how to select elders?”

We shy away from any thought about sex in the Bible. And that is a tragedy. Go back with me to the book of Genesis. Do you remember the picture God paints of two humans, made in his image, made for each other, standing there in the garden? It says they were “naked” and “unashamed.” And God called that “good.” In fact, the only thing in all creation that God said wasn't good was that man should be alone. Naked and unashamed was the good result. What marred that picture was not good reason and better sense; it was sin.

What we have pictured in this book—at least for the first major point tonight—is a love story that is a true love story. We have two lovers who are naked and unashamed. And it was good. I know that Hollywood has glamorized sex, sold sex, used sex and thus cheapened sex. I know that so many of us face the real temptation or even struggle with meaningless sexualizing of others, turning them into 2-dimensional images rather than actual people with souls. Let me add to the point. I know that our good-faith efforts to help our children avoid the dangers and pitfalls that come from seeing sex in an unhealthy way has sometimes only made the problem worse. There are books being written now by my generation speaking of how “purity culture” (as they call it) wreaked havoc on how they viewed themselves and others. I remember the youth group illustration where the speaker produced a perfectly beautiful flower, then passed it around the room and had everyone pinch a petal. By the time it made its way through the whole group, it looked awful. “This is you, when you sleep around,” he said.

I know the heart was in the right place. But do you know what many of them learned from that experience? First, I can't tell about my past experiences already. How embarrassing would that be? Second, I already messed up once. I might as well keep

doing it. I mean, once the shine is worn off, what difference does it make? And worst of all, it put the focus on the wrong thing. It made me think this was a bad thing. Which means my desires are bad things. And sex itself is a bad, dirty thing. Try flipping that switch on your wedding night.

I have a better idea. I wish we would read the Song of Songs more often. I mean read it carefully. This is not a compilation of cheap, tawdry sex scenes. This is a love story rooted in the healthiest of attitudes.

(a) These two know each other. They know each other well. They are so deeply interested in each other, they talk about sex in terms of how it can serve the other. They say things like “don’t stir up or awaken love until it is time” (2:7; 3:5).

(b) This man shows how to truly see his woman. A few years ago, John Travolta starred in a movie called Phenomenon. I won’t spoil the movie for you, but he has some experiences that cause the townspeople to be wary of him, to shun him, to even fear him. But he is able to win over the single woman in town that every man wishes they could have. Do you know how he does it? She makes chairs. Not very good ones. But she makes chairs and he kept buying her chairs. He acted like there were tons of people who wanted them. We find out later he stuck them in the back of his house. But near the end of the movie, some guys are in a bar making fun of him for his unusual experiences. And the ole wise man in the movie, Robert Duvall, looks at them and says, “How’s your lady love?”

“We broke up.”

“You did? That’s too bad. Now George, he’s got a lady love and she’s sticking with him. Do you know why? Because he bought her chairs. Seems smart to me. You’ve ever bought Lisa’s chairs? Every woman has her chairs...something she needs to put herself into. Did you ever figure out what Lisa’s chairs were and buy em? Nope.”

Read the Song of Solomon. Solomon found her chairs. And he goes lookin. He names every single part of her body, and he calls it beautiful. He sees the best in her. Someone wrote a book years ago titled “Sex begins in the kitchen.” It means love life should not just be what you do in the bedroom, but how you see each other, hear each other, and be with each other at breakfast. He makes her feel like there is no one else in the world.

And this is why God wanted sex to be monogamous. It’s why he wanted it to be in a loving, supportive marriage. So that our words would be authentic. That I see what no one can see or has seen. “A garden locked is my bride; a spring locked, a fountain sealed” (4:12). I have a secret key that unlocks a secret world that is too wonderful to behold. And I love every thing about it. Because I love everything about you.

Read chapter 4. “You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you” (4:7). “You have captivated my heart; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes” (4:9). Women, ever worry that your husband is more interested in the big game than in you? How about this line: “How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!” (4:10) Men: where is your desire? “I am by beloveds, and his desire is for me” (7:10)

You can see why at the end of chapter 4 she says “Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.” In other words, “come and get it!”

And by the way, she finds his chairs too. Harley wrote the book “his needs, her needs.” And number one for her is affection. To be adored and to show her you adore her. Number two is conversation—to truly hear her and to share how you feel with her. Number 3 is honesty and openness. My goodness. Is he reading the Song of Songs or what?

And what does a guy need? Well, sexual fulfillment is near the top, but so is admiration. Look at how she talks about him: “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” (2:8-9) What man doesn’t want his woman to see him that way? “Let me see your face, let me hear your voice. My beloved is mine, and I am his.” (2:16). In chapter 3. She has a dream. A dream that her man isn’t there, so she goes running into the streets to find him. When she does, she says “I held him, and would not let him go” (3:4). Hubba hubba! At the end of chapter 5: “If you find my beloved, tell him I am sick with love” (5:8). Some people ask her “what makes your man so special?” (5:9). She says “he is radiant and ruddy” then she describes every inch of his body. In the best possible light. Then she says “this is my beloved” (5:16)

Sex is good! It is holy. It is godly. It is supposed to be amazing! But that’s because everything about her—to you—is supposed to be amazing. “Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!” (5:1)

What can help you with that? Here are some tips:

- (1) She is my sister.
- (2) He is my friend (5:16)
- (3) We support each other: “left hand under my head; right hand embraces me” (8:3)

Conclude love story: 8:6-7.

Is there a gospel in this alone? Of course there is. Sin cause disunion. Sin caused us to become selfish. Sin caused decay. When we fight and nag. When we take rather than give. When we notice imperfections...we play out the story of the fall. But this is the original story: naked and unashamed. God sees you that way. And when we do it right, we proclaim the gospel to our spouse by how we see them.

We are imperfect at it, so the story has a second meaning. The speaker I quoted at the beginning laughed at anyone who would turn this into an allegory. Well, the church did. For centuries! There is plenty of great thought about Christ and the church here. And if you feel squimish about it, can I tell you two things:

First, you already have done it with our songs.

“The rose of Sharon (2:1)

“He invites me into his banquet table, and his banner over me is love” (2:4)

Second, Paul does it in Ephesians. (See also Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17)

What if our love was so pure? What if we really believed we are the bride of Christ? What if God looks at the church “without spot or wrinkle”, that he protects and supports his church. That his interest is in us. And what if we returned the favor?