

“Love’s Beginning”
Song Of Songs 1:1-2:2

May 3, 2018

SI: Last week we began a study of the Song of Songs.

This book is a collection of love poems in which three characters speak—
a woman, a man, and a chorus of her friends.

He mostly calls her *ra’ya*, which is a Hebrew term of endearment and familiarity.

English Bible versions have translated *ra’ya* several ways:

my love, my companion, my beloved, my friend, and my darling.

She mostly calls him *dwd*—which literally means uncle or close cousin.

That may seem strange, but in Hebrew love language it was a term of
intimacy and affection.

In American culture if a man calls a woman he loves “baby” that doesn’t sound
strange to us because we don’t take it literally. It’s a term of affection.

So the vast majority of English Bibles translate *dwd* as my beloved or my lover.

And then there’s this chorus of the woman’s unmarried friends who she refers to
several times as the Daughters of Jerusalem. They reflect her deepest thoughts.

One of the challenges of reading the Song is that sometimes it’s not clear who is
speaking—the man, the woman, or the chorus of friends.

Usually you can tell, but sometimes you have to make an educated guess and most
Bible versions will do that for you.

The New International Version which I will be reading has the headings

Beloved, when the woman is speaking. Lover, when the man is speaking.

And Friends, when the chorus is speaking.

The English Standard Version uses: He, She, and Others.

So as I read through this passage of Scripture, I’m going to do something I never
do, I’m going to interrupt with commentary, so we can keep track of the dialogue
that is going on in the poem.

¹ *Solomon's Song of Songs.*

The Song starts with a young woman—probably in her teens—she has seen a young
man, and she is thinking about him and she says to herself:

² *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than
wine.*

There is chemistry here. And there is more than chemistry. She continues:

³ *Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out.*

No wonder the maidens love you!

What kind of man is this who is wearing perfume? Is he a sissy?
Remember this is love poetry. Perfume is mentioned over and over in the Song.
Her perfume, his perfume, perfume of flowers, perfume in air.
Perfume is a way of talking about pleasure that comes from enjoying good things.
So what is it that smells good about this man? It's his name.
Your name is like perfume.

See, it's not just chemistry that attracts her to him.

He has a good reputation. He has a good name.
She says: No wonder the maidens love you.
He has the respect of all of the young, unmarried women.
They were all drawn to him because he's a man of good character.
He's good marriage material.

So she thinks about life with this man and she says to herself:

⁴ *Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.*
He's not a king. As we will see in a moment, he's a shepherd.
But to her, he's a king.

Her friends speak. Here's the chorus. These are young unmarried women
who reflect her deepest thoughts. They say:

We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.

Yes, they are saying. He would be the ideal husband. We like him too.
And she agrees with these young women, she says:
How right they are to adore you!

But when she realizes all the other young women have eye on this man it makes her
very unsure of herself. Starts talking about what doesn't like about herself.

⁵ *Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like
the tent curtains of Solomon.* ⁶ *Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am
darkened by the sun.*

She's very, very tan. But being tan was not a mark of beauty in that culture.

It was desirable to have skin that was not sunburned and darkened by the sun.
Probably because it said something about your status. If fair, didn't have to work.
And notice it's the city girls, daughters of Jerusalem who set the beauty standard.
So she looks at herself and says: I've got a good figure, but hate my tan.
She focuses on the negative. I hate my freckles. I hate my frizzy hair.
Then she explains why she is so tan.
My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards;

my own vineyard I have neglected.

So now we know a little more about her. She's had a hard family life.

No mention of her father. He must have died. Her older brothers have raised her. And she wanted to be like her girlfriends in town and stay inside out of the sun, but her brothers said: No way. Dad's gone and we have a farm to run.

Get to work in the vineyard. She's a working girl. She's a farm girl. And because of that he has neglected her appearance.

Now, it seems, she is actually talking to this young man—asks him a question.

⁷ Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?

Shepherds would rest flocks at noon, heat of day, find shade somewhere.

So she says: Tell me where you are going to have lunch. I want to join you.

But knows his friends going to be around, the other shepherds.

And she doesn't want to look desperate. She doesn't want to be humiliated. She wants some kind of encouragement from him.

Some indication that he actually wants her to join him for lunch.

He gives her that encouragement:

⁸ If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds.

When you bring your goats out, follow us, you'll find me.

He's letting her know that he wants her to come and eat with him—

but he's playing it cool, he's low key.

But as he watches her walk away, then we see what he's really thinking.

⁹ I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh. ¹⁰ Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels. ¹¹ We will make you earrings of gold, studded with silver.

He compares her to a horse. A mare with the chariots of Pharaoh. What? Egyptian chariots were pulled by stallions.

Sometimes in battle the enemy would send a mare in heat right into the middle of those stallions and there would be chaos.

Here's how the OT scholar Tremper Longman explains this image:

“He is saying that she drives all the men crazy with her attractiveness, with the implication that she drives him to distraction as well.”

He's watching her walk away after she's boldly asked him for a lunch date.

And he imagines her in jewelry. She doesn't have jewelry.

She's a country girl from a hard family. But to him, she's a queen with jewelry.

So they meet at noon. This is the way she describes it:

¹² *While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.*

It's really a picnic under a tree with a shepherd, to her it's a banquet with a king.

¹³ *My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts.* ¹⁴ *My lover is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi.*

There's that perfume thing again. Myrrh, rare, expensive aromatic resin.

Henna blossoms, a fragrant flower used to make perfume

En-Gedi is a famous desert oasis in Israel filled with pools and waterfalls.

This is one special picnic.

Then he speaks and tells her what he thinks of her.

¹⁵ *How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.*

Does he say this because doves have dark shining eyes? Is it because doves are romantic birds who mate for life? Hey, it's poetry. Let's go with the flow.

Then it's her turn:

¹⁶ *How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant.*

What bed is she talking about? Verdant means green with grass.

She talking about the grass they are lying on.

But she's actually hinting about getting married. She's talking about marriage bed.

She's talking about setting up housekeeping, as our grandparents used to say.

And how does he respond to this hint?

Does he back off? Is he afraid of commitment? Not at all. He says:

¹⁷ *The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs.*

He looks up at the branches of tree they are lying under—it's a cedar tree—fragrant tree—there's that perfume thing again—and he says

Yes. This grass is our bed. And do you see those branches?

Those are the rafters of the future house we are going to build together.

They're dreaming about the future together and talking about it.

Then she speaks, listen to what she says about herself:

¹ *I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.*

All her uncertainty about her appearance is gone.

She is no longer worried about her tan. She's not saying: I am as dark as a tent.

She is saying: I'm a rose. I'm a lily.

Because she knows he loves her and wants to spend the rest of his life with her.

Then he speaks once again and confirms it.

² *Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.*

In other words, I have eyes for no one but you.

INTRO: Some parts of the Bible tell us things directly in a teaching fashion.

Like book of Romans—Paul gives a detailed presentation of Gospel.

Teaches the great doctrines of original sin, predestination, justification.

Other parts of the Bible show us things. We have to figure out what God telling.

The Song of Songs is one of those parts of the Bible that mostly shows us things.

It shows us a picnic under a cedar tree. It shows us two people in love.

But it doesn't tell us anything directly.

You can't help smiling when you read this first poem.

She hates her tan and he thinks she's a mare!

Lord wants us to look at these two and ask ourselves:

What makes this so good? What makes us smile?

What gives us a deep down sense of the freshness and even a longing for this?

I said last week that the Song of Solomon has a lot to teach us about marriage.

I'm certainly going to point out those marriage lessons when they come.

But this book of the Bible is not just about marriage or just for married people—
it's for all Christians.

And if you let the Holy Spirit speak to you through the beauty of this divine poetry
it can give you a bigger, more balanced view of the Christian life.

We are all influenced by the secular culture and the secular worldview around us.

By secular I mean non-supernatural, anti-God, humanistic.

That viewpoint is all around us.

And as Christians there are points were we give in and adopt that viewpoint,

and there are places where we over-react against it and reject things we shouldn't.

Here's where I think the Song of Songs is so helpful.

So let's meditate on this first poem and consider two points.

1. The goodness of creation

2. The wonder of love

MP#1 The goodness of creation

When you read this opening chapter you can't help but be struck by the goodness of God's creation, the goodness of the physical world.

All sorts of things physical things are celebrated. Let's list them:

kisses

wine

perfume

vineyards

jewelry: ear rings, necklaces

gold, silver

horses and chariots

myrrh

breasts

henna blossoms

En Gedi—a particularly beautiful place

doves

green grass

cedar trees, fir trees

roses, lilies

In future chapters this list will expand—all sorts of fruit and flowers are mentioned, other special places, clothing, foods, and other parts of the human body.

Out in the narthex I have some posters announcing this sermon series.

They were designed by Emily Krenkel Bussman. Once member, pastor's wife.

Read the Song and design a poster. She's an artist.

She picked pomegranates. You'll never look at pomegranates same way.

I mentioned last week that there have been times in the history of the Christian church when all these things in the Song were interpreted as purely symbolic.

And part of the reason for that was an unbiblical view of creation that has at various times had influence in the church.

There are different variations, but essentially the view is that there are certain material things that are inherently evil or dangerous sources of temptation so they should best be avoided.

We could just look at the list of things in this chapter and identify some of those.

Like wine. Your love is better than wine.

Every one of us know people who have been destroyed by wine.

We know innocent children and spouses whose lives have been overshadowed by the alcohol abuse of a mother or father, a husband or wife.

The Bible even says that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God—

so there can be eternal consequences for the abuse of wine.
The chapter mentions jewelry, it mentions gold and silver.
We know what materialism does to people—it makes them care more about stuff
and things than other human beings and even more than God himself.
There will be vast numbers of people in hell because of the love of money—
far more than are there because of the love of wine.
And what about the biggest thing in this chapter? Sexual attraction.
Just think of how much trouble that has caused.
Even David, the man after God’s own heart, stumbled in this.
Proverbs says the house of the adulteress is the way to Sheol.

But it’s wrong to respond to these dangerous temptations by viewing the material
world as inherently evil or even as potential danger to be avoided.
There’s not a whiff of that in the entire Song of Songs.
All the lovely and pleasurable things of creation are enjoyed and celebrated.

And that word “creation” that is the key to getting our theology correct.
We believe this world and everything in it was created by God.
God alone is . Everything else is part of his creation. It’s not God.
So he alone is to be worshipped.
That’s the problem with secularism. If you don’t believe in God,
then this world is all there is, so you end up worshipping material things.
As Paul says in Romans, man exchanges the glory of the immortal God for images
of mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
Wine promises to free you from your sorrows so people make it their god.
Money promises safety from the contingencies of life so people make it their god.
Sex promises pleasure or affirmation so people make it their god.

But as Christians we have this wonderful position. God is our God.
He’s the source of all the things we long for—security, pleasure, approval.
And he gives us this glorious creation to use and enjoy—
within the boundaries of his law—which is life to us.
In the Song there is the celebration of sexual intimacy and there is the celebration
of marriage—God’s law—God’s good way and plan.
Our stance as Christians toward the material world and toward creation should
be a positive one. Yes, we recognize our fallen natures. Yes, know temptations.
But guard against that is Holy Spirit applying law of God to hearts.
This first poem impresses on us the goodness of creation and also . . .

MP#2 The wonder of love

There are three qualities that make the love of this young woman and man shine.

1. First, their love is particular

“You are a lily among thorns.” That’s the way he puts it.

He doesn’t have his eyes on any of the other girls—even ones with fair skin—they are all thorns to him—she is the lily.

She feels the same for him.

This is the only man who makes her think of perfume.

She has no interest in the other shepherds.

This has been God’s plan for marital love from the beginning.

When God made Eve, she was the only woman in the world for Adam—literally.

That is how God intends it to be in all marriages—

as if she were the only woman in the world and he were the only man.

The particular love of marriage is a picture of the God’s love for you.

He loves you in particular. He views you as a lily among thorns.

Jesus Christ says something wonderful in John 10.

He says the shepherd calls his sheep by name.

Jesus knows your name. He knows you. He has known you from eternity.

In that same passage Jesus says: I lay down my life for my sheep.

The warmth and sweetness of the Gospel is that he died for me because he loved me and chose me.

My name was written on his heart from all eternity.

He thought of me when he hung on the cross.

I am to Jesus Christ a lily among thorns. He has called me by name.

What happens when you know you are the object of particular love?

It changes your view of our self, just like it did for the women in the poem.

She goes from saying: I’m as dark as a tent to I’m a rose. I’m a lily.

She’s filled with confidence in her personal value and beauty.

Knowing Jesus love for you can fill you with a great confidence—

and that enables you then to be a loving person to the people in your life—your spouse certainly, but all the other people as well.

A second quality of their love that makes us smile is intimacy.

2. Their love is intimate.

They progressively open themselves to each other.

This will continue throughout the Song—into their married life.

But even here at love’s beginning, their intimacy grows.

She tells him she wants to meet him at midday when he rests his sheep.

That was a risk. She was showing her feelings toward him.

He opened his heart to her request. He didn't shun or embarrass her. Then during their picnic he tells her how beautiful she is: Your eyes are doves. She didn't roll her eyes when he said that, but accepted it with pleasure. When she hints about the marriage bed—he doesn't back away—he encourages her and joins in dreaming about their future.

What you see is that neither puts up a wall as they get closer and closer with each revelation of deeper feelings and desires. Instead there is a corresponding revelation and growing intimacy. This eventually leads to marriage—will get there the week after next. Things get very flowery and perfumey in that chapter.

After God made Eve, and awakened Adam—brought them together—final word: “The man and his wife were naked and unashamed.” This is a vivid description of intimacy. Their physical nakedness signified they were hiding nothing from one another. Their thoughts, their feelings, their desires, their plans were all shared.

Married people, is your love intimate or have you put up walls against your spouse? Are their areas of your life that you have declared off limits? Do you recoil when spouse wants more intimacy in particular part of life? The power for intimate love comes from Jesus Christ. He knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself because he is God. He knows your true motives when you are fooling yourself. When you are doing something because you think it is the good and right thing to do but deep down you are really being driven by selfishness, self-preservation, Jesus knows that about you. And he loves you, and wants you to know him better.

3. Their love is delightful.

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; your love is more delightful than wine.”

That's the way she puts it.

When Adam saw Eve for the first time he said:

At last—this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

Adam was celebrating. When he laid eyes on her—realized this was who missing.

Here was a person who as like him and yet so different from him.

Those differences that were a great source of wonder and delight.

They are intended to delight. That is how God made us.

And the delightful love of a man and a woman points to something bigger.

Bible say something remarkable about the love of God for his people.

His love for you is delightful. You give him pleasure.

Expressed most clearly in Zephaniah 3

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
He will quiet you with his love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.

This is amazing that God himself, a perfectly good being,
perfectly satisfied in the fellowship of the Trinity takes delight in us.
How can that be? With all our sins, faults, and weaknesses?

The only explanation that makes sense is that he delights in us through Christ.
Through Christ he sees our eternal identity.
He sees us as he created us to be.
He delights in us as people made in his image.
He forgives and overlooks our present sins and faults for Jesus' sake.
He knows what we are going to become one day.

Delightful love for the people God has brought into your life—spouse,
children, friends—ultimately comes from really believing that God himself
delights over you through Jesus Christ.

Sometimes faults of people come into focus and have to be dealt with—
but when you love someone you forgive them their faults—
because you see something deeper—see their eternal identity.

So there are no deep theological arguments in this passage.
God shows us a picnic under a cedar tree—the shepherd and shepherdess in love.
So that we will ponder the goodness of the love he has poured out.

Allow God's word to soak in.

Allow it to give you an appreciation for God's good creation—
and a longing to know and to give the wonderful love that comes from his heart.