

Looking on. Looking up.

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Date: 05 February 2020

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] Now, certainly opening bookings or opening examinations of these chapters in Song of Solomon, how the whole of the song ultimately is pointing to Christ.

As is, of course, all of the scriptures, especially in a more hidden way, the Old Testament scriptures. But we might think, well, in the first instance, was Solomon really talking about the Messiah?

Did he know that this is what he was pointing to? Or was it really just a song about love, about different loves of different people that he had, whether it's queens or princesses or whatever it may be?

Is that really, is he pointing to something higher? Does he know that he is? Or is he just looking at what's directly in front of the ear? Well, I think we have to recognize that if we ourselves are able, through the word of the Spirit, to recognize, to see how the scriptures are pointing always onwards and upwards, how everything in creation itself paints, as it were, a picture, an illustration of a deeper spiritual truth.

Truly, the hidden spiritual things are declared by the things that we can see. And God, I would suggest you, intends it that way. Now, if we comparatively unintelligent or uninspired as we are, in comparison with the depth of wisdom that Solomon was given, if we are able to grasp this reality, how much more needs must he, particularly in his young and wiser days, have recognized these things?

[1 : 37] Before his mind and his heart and body were corrupted and led away from the Lord in the earlier days of his reign, when he had that purity of wisdom and knowledge, it is impossible for us to believe that in the midst of all the loves in which he was engaged, he did not recognize that in these things there is a higher power, a higher fulfillment, and pointing to something more complete.

Because even if you were, like Solomon, the very pinnacle of achievement and wealth and glory and so on, as we see from Ecclesiastes, if he himself is saying, if this is all there is, then it's all just vanity.

It's all just empty. So even he must, in his day, have recognized that even these very songs of love are pointing to something more than the merely personal, the merely immediate.

They are pointing on to a deeper, more lasting fulfillment in Christ. So as we continue that from chapter 1 into chapter 2, we read, I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys.

Although we tend to think of Christ as the Lily of the Valleys, the Rose of Sharon and so on, in the context it's almost certainly it is the Beloved, it is the bride, the girl speaking in this sense.

[3 : 02] I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys. Now the word translated as Rose, it doesn't mean exclusively Rose as we understand it in our Western terms, but rather the actual Hebrew comes from a root that means, you know, meadow saffron, which is a different kind of plant or flower, but it could also mean any of these particular kinds of flowering, colourful body plants and flowers, which have a strong, pungent almost kind of bulb, so that the sense is of both loneliness, the Lily down in the valley, loneliness and humility, and she's humble in her beauty, and yet at the same time there is this aroma, there is this fragrance of beauty and of virtue, and the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys.

Now Sharon was an area in the northern part of the Holy Land. It was between Mount Tabor and the Sea of Galilee, so the northern part of the Holy Land, and it's referenced, for example, in Isaiah 35, verses 1 to the wilderness, and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Some translations would quote us there. Again, the sense of a more generic description of these bulbous flowers, which give off a strong fragrance and aroma.

It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon, again, to the north of the Holy Land, shall be given unto it the excellency of Carmel, northern mountain on the coast, and Sharon.

Same area as is referenced here. They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God. So her beauty is such that she is lowly, humble in her beauty, and yet it's almost as though the bride herself here is the personification of love itself.

[5 : 08] Christ is the ultimate expression of love, and she, along with the bridegroom here, along with the lover, are both together declaring and showing the loveliness of Christ.

Just as, you know, God says, you know, we'll make man in our image, male and female, created he then who together complement, as it were, and show forth, as it were, the fullness of God.

So as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. This is the lover now responding, the bridegroom responding. She says, I'm the rose of Sharon, the lily of the rams.

He says, as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. Now, obviously, if you've got a lily in the midst of hooty thorns, and certain sharp, spiky plants round about, then its beauty is even more apparent by contrast.

And the contrast of the beauty, the gentleness, the loveliness, the fragrance of Christ, in the midst of what the rest of the world is like, in the midst of what his enemies are like, and their enmity against him, the contrast cannot be greater.

[6 : 22] Love is a powerful force. I don't mean that in the sort of care. Tweet and cheesy sense. But rather, love is a force, a power of which you can kill the individual, but you cannot kill the power of that love, the witness, the testimony.

You know what he said about one of the early martyrs of the Reformation, George Patrick Hamilton, when he was burned at the stake in St. Andrew, he said that the reek, the smoke of Master Hamilton, infected as many as it blew upon.

Those who witnessed his execution, it was meant to be a deterrent from those who would embrace the doctrines of grace, and the Reformation ideas of, you know, the free grace of God and the authority of the Bible.

And he was witnessing for this, and by his very death, what was meant to testify, to crush this light of the love of God.

In fact, there's a saying of the time he had it, that as many of whom were touched by the smoke that blew away from his burning at the stake, they all seemed to be infected by these doctrines of grace.

[7 : 32] You cannot kill the power of love itself. You cannot kill the love of God. It is such a power, such a strength as overcomes, and crushes ultimately, you know, the soft voice break of the bone, as it says elsewhere in Scripture.

So, as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. You know, which would you rather have? The thorns of the beauty, gentleness, humility of the lily.

As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under a shadow of great delight, his fruit was sweet to my taste. Now, again, just as rose doesn't necessarily mean literally rose alone, exclusively, as we would understand it now in a modern Western culture.

So, likewise, apple here is not exclusively apple, as we understand it. It could also apply to other fruits, like pomegranate, or others that might be applicable in the context.

It's translated as apple. It's not inaccurate. It's just that it could be any of these sort of blossoming fruits that are intended to convey both the fruitfulness, the sweetness, the nourishment of all that is given.

[8 : 52] It's the apple tree among the trees of the woods. If you come across an apple tree in the midst of a forest, in the midst of a little clearing sort of thing, all the other trees, pines and firs and so on, or steeders round about, you know, they're not fruit trees.

They're maybe tall, they may be majestic, they may be good for timber, but the contrast with an apple tree, as you come across it with its fruitfulness, and how pleasant they will be in the clearing. It's described here in this way, suddenly coming across that which would be like to, in the clearing of a forest. There's the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sun. I sat down under his shadow with great delight. The shade that Christ gives from the power of the law, from the wrath of God, from almost like the dominating, tall, dark kind of wrath of God that might surround, he gives the shade, the shelter, the protection.

I sat down under his shadow with great delight. His fruit was sweet to my taste. This is a fruit which it is perfectly permissible. It is encouraged to partake of.

[10:06] And like in Genesis in chapter 2, in verse 17 there, where the Lord warns Adam and says, the day you eat this particular fruit, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll surely die.

So that was a fruit that had a thread with it. Fruit that was, in a sense, spiritually poisonous. But this fruit is sweet to the taste. I sat down under his shadow with great delight.

His fruit was sweet to my taste. We come to Christ, and we partake of Christ, and it not only nourishes the soul, it is sweet to the taste as well.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Now we think in terms of banquet nowadays, of being a big feast. But banquet really, in the original sense, is not so much a feast of lots and lots of fruit.

There might be a wee bit of fruit there, but a banquet is by definition a banquet of wine. And if you think of the book of Esther, where Esther invites King Ahasuerus and Haman to our banquet of wine, it is almost like a selection of all the best of the wines that try and taste the different ones.

[11:15] The banquet is about wine. He brought me to the banqueting house, that the only people who would have so many different kinds of fine wines to taste, to try, to enjoy, would be the super rich, would be the kings, would be the highly wealthy merchants and princes and so on.

So to be invited to the banquet is to be one of the most honoured guests of all, to partake of the best of the best. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was like, you see, the suggestion, the illustration here, is of a hero who has conquered in battle, who has brought his standard and planted it in the midst of this banqueting house, where he claims the prize of all the most beautiful and the most expensive and luxurious of the wines, and has won the heart of his lady as well.

So it's almost like the knight in shining armour thing, where you put the banner that floats overhead, that has been carried successfully in battle. His banner over me was love.

We are sheltering beneath that banner. Remember, God is love. That is the description of him. Let's get 1 John 4, verse 16. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.

God is love. And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. His banner over us, that which flutters in the breeze. Now we might think that his sort of commandment's over us, or his tablets of stone, and his wrath, that's law that's over us.

[12:57] But the banner that is over us is love, if we will, as it were, enlist under that banner. If we will know ourselves redeemed, almost conquered, as it were, by that banner, we don't have anything to fear.

His banner over me was love. Thou hast given a banner to those that fear thee. I get Psalm 68, verse 4. And that's if we're loving the Lord and feeding the Lord. The fear of the Lord is to love the Lord.

Stay me with flagons. Comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love. Now, some will translate this word flagons as, you know, dried cakes of raisins, which is, it's not an inaccurate translation of the original here, but the sense of the banqueting house, which would imply lots and lots of wine, and selection and choice, might tie in better with this translation of flagons.

Because flagons of wine, abundance of wine, plenty of wine, stay me with flagons, and strengthen me, bear me up, give me a bit of extra courage, a bit of extra sort of strengthening, comfort me, strengthen again with apples.

For I am sick of love. Now, we can't say, oh, I'm sick of this, I'm sick of that. And we may, I can't be bothered with it anymore. I'm sick of something. We mean that we've had enough of it.

[14:16] It makes us sick. Well, the sense here is not of that. It's almost like, I am faint with love. Now, all of us, I'm sure, have been in love at some point or other.

You know, even if it was only at school and the first crush that we ever had, you know, you feel so faint inside. You sort of go all sort of weak at the knees when the one you're crazy about walks past in the corridor, or you go all shy.

You're weak. You're sick. You're not yourself. You're all weak at the knees, and your heart's a flutter. You are unwell. You're not yourself because you are made sick, made unwell because of love.

That's the effect that it has on you. And this is the sense here. I am weak because of love. I am weak at the knees. I'm fainting because of love.

So give us the flaggings of wine. Give us the apple strength of me. Build me up a bit here because I am sick. I'm fainting with this love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand of embracing me.

[15:20] Again, this is taken by commentators as pointing forward to the time of gospel blessing. The left hand, of course, was the hand less honourable.

The right hand, the hand that was active in grace and honourable. You wouldn't, for example, give somebody a gift with your left hand because that would be less honourable.

You would give a gift with the right hand. So that the left hand is the hand of, you might say, wrath or judgment or that which is less honourable. The right hand, that which is more active for grace, you might say.

So the left hand is under the head. It's not, it's no longer a hand that's going to smite. It's not a hand of wrath anymore, but rather it supports the shoulders, the head, it bears up instead of bearing down.

And the right hand, it does the embracing, the gospel, the love of the Lord here, which pours out his love at his own expense. This is that which does the embracing.

[16:28] Now, of course, in chapter 8, the last chapter of Song of Solomon there, there's a similar phrase, but that's a hoped-for situation. That's a yearning situation.

His left hand would be under my head. His right hand should embrace me, but it doesn't at that stage and that point. But here, it does. Here the love is received.

Even that which was fearful before, we might take that left hand of wrath and of threatening us being the old law. The old law, which now instead of condemning, bears us up.

Remember, the New Testament tells us the law is good and holy and spiritual. Jesus said, I'm not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. And if the law is fulfilled, if that which is holy and good is fulfilled, it bears us up.

As his left hand is under my head, his right hand doth embrace me. That which is active for grace, active for love, embraces, sustains, supports, and gives delight.

[17:36] I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the ropes, by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till ye preach. Now, a couple of things here. First of all, it was considered in the East a huge insult to disturb somebody from their sleep.

You can add more and more sort of layers of perhaps legend or myth or whatever to it. Some people believe that the soul, as it were, was apart from the body whilst they were asleep.

And if they were awakened suddenly, then they might sort of spring it around when the soul wasn't quite rejoined again to the body. So you had to awaken them gently and delicately so the soul had to come back again.

And I hope there's no spiritual evidence that that isn't actually how body and soul work. But it's a sort of Eastern kind of myth or legend or whatever. But what is definitely the case is that it was considered a great insult to disturb somebody, particularly if it was a person of rank.

Somebody who was your social superior, as it were. A servant would never waken their master except by the express command of somebody more superior.

[18:52] It was not their place to waken their master. So if somebody was of superior rank, and here of course she regards her beloved as being of superior rank in that sense, not to be disturbed.

I charge you the daughters of Jerusalem by the rows and the hinds of the field that ye stir not up nor awake my love till he pleads. Again, this sense here of not being waken, but rather resting and delighting in that rest.

Like Zephaniah 3, verse 17, the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty. He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with sin.

You might think, well, they're sinning, they're going to wake him up. That's no point in that. But think of it rather as almost how a mother with a child like sinned to it softly and gently to encourage it to sleep and how one sort of delighting over their lover, their beloved, as they just doze quietly and just hum or sing softly to them just to encourage the deeper sleep and the greater slumber, rejoicing over them, delighting even in their sleep, delighting over them as they sleep, rejoicing over them with singing.

He said, if ye stir not up, not awake my love till he please. Now, at the beginning of this verse 7, there is this question mark we might say, I charge you what you don't as Jerusalem, by the robes and the hinds of the field.

[20 : 30] Now that sounds like this is an oath, you know, like if somebody swears by almighty God, but then I swear by the robes and by the hinds of the field. No, it's not an oath in that sense, but rather it's, it's almost like likening the deer, the hinds of the field to those who are, if a hunter is coming after them and they are suddenly, you know, where ears prick up and they're sort of alert and then the least little lars they'll be pounding away, they'll be darting off.

So if they are not going to be frightened off, then you must almost, as it were, tiptoe around. You have to go so gently, so softly, just as you would with the robes or the hinds of the field, not to disturb them, not to alarm them, not to frighten them off, not to suddenly stir them up.

So just tiptoe around, like you would with the robes and the hinds of the field, just go so gently, just go so tenderly. Now, of course, if we think of Psalm 22, Psalm 22, which of course has in its title to the chief musician upon the age of the shahar, which some take to apply to perhaps the Hebrew musical instruments or whatever, but also is translatable as hind of the morning.

Psalm 22, to a chief musician upon hind of the morning. And some take that psalm as being applicable to Christ, like the hind of a deer who is being hunted by the vicious dogs.

For dogs have come past me, verse 16 of Psalm 22. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet like a deer being hunted by the dogs.

[22 : 18] So Christ, the hind of the morning, is in danger of being disturbed, chased, hunted, as it were, by the dogs. So don't disturb him.

Like the robes of the hinds of the field, let him sleep. Let him stay in my arms, as it were, she is saying of her delight. But then, as we move into verse 8, it's almost like, in the original, it's like a new song, another canticle, one of the old-fashioned titles for the song of Solomon is the book of Canticles, which means songs, a love song.

So it's moved into verse 8, a new kind of canticle, a new song has begun, the voice of my beloved. And like she hears her beloved's voice, it's shut out.

Suddenly she's delighting and behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved, it's like a roe on a young heart. Behold, he stands behind our wall and looks forth at the window, showing himself through the lattice.

Now, the ease with which, I'm sure we've all seen deer bounding, you know, up the hillside or along over the moor, I mean, they're such graceful creatures and they make such ease of obstacles which to ordinary creatures or beasts would be so difficult.

[23 : 33] You know, big high fences and you've seen deer just taking them in a graceful act, you know, easily, almost from a standing position or a couple of steps and there they go, sailing over it.

It's easy for them, leaping upon the mountain, skipping upon the hills. It doesn't matter the obstacle there is in the way that deer just go sailing over the top of it.

And here we have, as it's often taken as being, the mountains, the hills of opposition, as it were, to Christ. Our sins, our things that come between us and the Lord, the things that would be barriers to our being united.

the greatest leaps over the mountain, not bothered, it skips upon the hills like a deer sailing over the fence, the wall, whatever the problem may be. He comes leaping upon the mountain, skipping upon the hills.

My beloved, it's like a roe or a young heart. Nothing is too much of a problem for Christ. There is nothing that he cannot overcome.

[24 : 39] He's standing behind our wall, looking forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice. Now, if he is behind the wall, it means we can see a bit of that. But we can't see all of them.

He's looking forth at the windows, either looking out or looking in through the lattice, which was a sort of crisscross kind of wooden grill that they had over the windows in the east.

So if somebody's looking through the window, you can see them partially, but you can't see all of them. You can't get a clear picture on them. You can see that they're there. And there's a sense in which in the Old Testament times, they could look forward to see something of Christ, but they couldn't see him as clearly as they could in the New Testament.

Jesus said in John 8, verse 56, your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. And he saw it and was glad.

And you might think, well, how could Abraham possibly see Jesus? It's not physically, not in the biological sense, but he was enabled to look forward by grace and to see something of Christ in his glory in the far distance as it were.

[25 : 49] By the spirit, he was enabled to recognize and to see, looking through the lattice, looking through the windows as it were, the lattice, he stands behind the wall.

So we see little glimpses of Christ. We see pointers to Christ. We see partial revealings of Christ, but we don't see the fullness of it in the Old Testament.

And this is the sense of it here. It is pointing us likewise to him. And again, from verse 10 onwards, it appears to be pointing onwards to glory, pointing onwards to heaven, the invitation of the beloved. My beloved, speak and say unto me, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. Come with me to heaven. Come with me to glory. Come with me to the kingdom that has been prepared for those that love me.

For lo, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone. What is the winter for our lives? Is it not this veil of tears? Is it not this body of sin, this fallen world in which we are compelled to dwell for a time?

[27 : 01] It is winter here. Even the fruitfulness that we see is, you know, it's almost against the odds we see fruitfulness. The days of sunshine are short compared to the eternity the Lord has prepared in glory for those that love him.

We think in the winter, yes, we do see days but the days are short and the nights are long and dark and it's cold and all the creatures are either hibernating or desperately hunting for food and most of the plants and growth is just all shut down and shut away and that's the equivalent of this world in comparison to the full riotous bloom of spring and summer and the ongoing growth and delight which is the equivalent of heaven itself with all the blossoming fruitfulness the glory the endless wall to wall as it were glory and sunshine that the Lord reveals not that it's the sun itself we're told that in Revelation but he shines more gloriously than the sun the fulfillment the fruitfulness the glory is there rise up my love my fear and come away though the winter has passed the rain is open and gone the flowers appear on the earth the time of the singing of birds has come and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land and so on now what is referenced here is almost certainly not yet the fullness of glory the invitation is to come to heaven but heaven is not yet heaven is not yet for the beloved heaven is not yet for the believer because what we read of here is yes the flowers appear on the earth the buds the blossoms but not yet the fullness of the fruit the singing of the birds is come but not yet the fullness of joy the voice of the turtle is heard in our land what does that mean it doesn't mean the turtle that sort of swims in the water with a shell on its back it means the turtle dove now remember when John baptized Jesus that the dove came down as it were from below the spirit descended like a dove some people take this voice of the turtle of the dove being heard as being John's ministry before Christ began his public ministry the fig tree could have poured her green fakes and the buns with the tender grape give a good smell all of this implies a fruitfulness that is springing forth green shoots coming out but not yet the fullness and the ripeness of the harvest not yet summer not yet harvest time not yet fulfillment but the promise is there there the green sheets are coming there the fig tree put it forth the green figs the vines with the tender grape they're not yet the full plump grapes ready to be plucked not yet ready for the harvest not yet ready for the fruitfulness but there's all the promise is there so come on my beloved arise my love my fear when I come away come with me says the beloved come with me says Christ the promise is all there the fullness is all yet just before you the blossoming has begun don't miss out on all that is laid up for those that would love him oh my dove that art in the cliffs of the rock in the secret places of the stairs let me see thy countenance let me hear thy voice for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is coming we think we don't have sweet voices we're not coming to look up oh no but we are made beautiful by his calmness by his beauty of holiness by his righteousness we hide in the clefts of the rock now there is no hiding as it were from the wrath of the law in all its fruits no Elijah is hid in the cleft of the rock where the glory of God passes by Moses is hid in the cleft of the rock we if we are to be hid in the cleft of the rock who is our rock Christ is the rock of our salvation sometimes the clefts the gashes in the rock are taken as being illustrated of the wounds of Christ the wounds in which we hide to be sheltered from the wrath of God against sin and sweet is the voice of the supplicant sweet is the voice of the prayer to the Lord because if they come to him in the name of Jesus then their voice is sweet their calmness is not in themselves but in him who clothes down take us then the foxes or jackals it can also be translated the little foxes that spoil the vines for our vines are tender grapes and the thing about the young foxes was they weren't

interested in the blossoms they weren't interested in the flowers there was no danger further at that point they only came for the vines once the fruit had begun to grow once the fruit had begun to plump up not the full plump grapes at the end of that harvest time but the little young ones when they were beginning to grow that's when they would eat them up that's when there was the danger and of course we all know that when a soul begins with christ when their relationship with him is yet tender and we might say fragile then they are most easily knocked back then they are most easily turned away when they haven't yet put down their roots when they haven't yet been strengthened by wisdom and experience the foxes have to be taken away we have to pray for protection against these sins and interferences that may come between us and the lord have robbed us of the promise of that fulfilled fruit the fruit has begun but the foxes might eat it the seed may be scattered by the path on the wayside the birds of the air can come and eat it up we can't let that happen my beloved is mine and I his he feedeth among the lilies until the day break the little translation there is until the day begins to breathe and some take that as being in the

Middle East you know there will be a sort of fresh breath of wind as the dawn was about to come until the day begins to breathe or breaks the shadows flee away turn my beloved and be thou like a roaring on heart upon the mountains of if the day is beginning to break if the shadows are going then day is about to dawn the night is far spent the day is at hand and this day of course ultimately is only a blessed eternity some of course have turned it round the other way and said till the day is breaking it's breaking down it's beginning to die night is coming down because the shadows are going because blackness of course blots out the shadows and until night falls in other words our death comes then we need the Lord to be like the role of the young heart leaping over the mountains of our opposition so it's a little more satisfying I think to look at it not the coming of night the coming of the ultimate new day but you can see how throughout this chapter it is looking on and looking up and seeing in the fruitfulness of the ground the soil the vines the fruitfulness of the love of the lover and the beloved we see the love of

Christ pointing us on to the ultimate fulfillment when this world with its tears and its ailments and its dis-ease and all its ultimate death is left behind and the new day has dawned and the fruitfulness and the blossoming and all the promise that is there is at last fulfilled but it is fulfilled not in the world itself it is fulfilled in Christ of whom this song sings let's pray