

Introduction

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

- [0 : 00] Now we seek to begin this evening a series working through the book of the Song of Solomon. Now this is a book obviously which inevitably we may shy away from slightly. There is an inevitable anxiety about it because it is, to be frank, far more anatomical in some details than we are perhaps in our culture entirely comfortable with. But nevertheless the language of the lover which is in and through this book is a cleared portrayal of the intimacy of love between Christ and his church. In fact it is that spiritualised interpretation, that allegory if we might say. An allegory of course is that in which every aspect of a narrative points to something else as a fulfilment, as something that's actually illustrated. It's different from a parable in the sense that a parable has the narrator is narrating through the parable. And then maybe explaining it afterwards. But in an allegory it simply tells a story or a narrative where every detail of the story points to something else.
- [1 : 11] It indicates something else. So this Song of Solomon is an allegory of the love of God for his people both in the Old Testament and in a New Testament sense. Now my own interest in this particular song was at a peak if you like a few years back when reading through various devotional material that I had at the time. One of the things that it said in a particular piece I was reading was that we try in our Christian life to be diligent and to be faithful and follow the commandments and keep the rules. And it can descend particularly perhaps if we have been brought up with the things of the Lord. And it's all that we have ever known even after we are converted and the Lord breathes a new spiritual life into it. It can descend into a certain drudgery if you can say that reverently. Just as if you think for example of an ordinary marriage where you've got the high and the excitement of the wedding and honeymoon and new home and everything's fresh and new.
- [2 : 19] But little by little the job still has to be done. The work still has to be there. You get bad days at work. You come home tired. Maybe you knock at each other. The bills still have to be paid. The bills are always more than there seems to be an income for. The house still gets dirty. If there's a baby it's still pride. It still keeps you awake at night. And all the other things that come in and are part and parcel of even a cruel and happy marriage can nevertheless wear away and erode some of the joy and the freshness and the delight that there ought to be in one another. And the point that the illustrator was making in the devotional book I was referring to is the fact that our Christian life can become something of a treadmill. And he said, I'm seeking to be at least outwardly righteous, faithful, diligent, slogging away, keeping the rules, following our duties and commands, trying to be ethical, trying to do what God would want us to do.

[3 : 25] And it can become something at times of, if we may say it, but it would be a treadmill. And he said, we need to rediscover the language of the lover and the beloved.

And that struck in my mind that, yes, there is this certain kind of treadmill, this certain can descend into drudgery and rule keeping and trying to be good and trying to do our best.

And we can lose something of the edge and the warmth. And it can grow a bit colder than it should. Just as an ordinary manager life can descend into just routine and lose something of the excitement that it should have.

To rediscover then the language of the lover and the beloved. Now, how does one do that without either falling over into impropriety, which would be perhaps the particular fault of our own generation, where everything goes and everything's in your face and on display and so on, and there's almost no kind of modesty or reverence or anything like that.

So how do you avoid that extreme or on the other, the sort of sappy, kind of slushy Victorian sentimentality that might be in, you know, some of the children's films that maybe I was brought up with.

[4 : 42] It just ooze sentimentality a wee bit. And you almost think, that's a wee bit too on the sugary side. So how do you avoid these extremes? Well, the only way that you can be guaranteed safety and propriety and know that this is not disordering to God, either by becoming a reverent on the one hand or overly familiar or degrading on the one hand or overly sentimental on the other hand.

Where do you know you're safe? Well, you know you're safe in the Word of God. You cannot go wrong with the Word of God. And therefore, if you go to the Word of God, then you seek to discover there the language of the lover and the beloved.

Well, of course, there's plenty of passages that speak of that, but none more so. The ultimate love song of Scripture is the song of Solomon.

And therefore, if we are to seek the language of the lover and the beloved, then there is in one sense no better place to begin than to seek the Lord's truth here in this greatest, as it were, song of songs, which is Solomon's.

So it is spiritual allegory. It is deep. And, you know, it is said that the Jews, and they had that in their manuscripts, it was considered so important and so rich and vital describing the relationship between Jehovah and his people of Israel, that they placed it in order, the section that they placed it in their Old Testament manuscripts, not now in the present Hebrew Bible, but in those days, was said to be straight after the books of the, what's called the Pentateuch, the books of the law, that is Genesis to Deuteronomy, and then Joshua.

[6 : 35] And then it was straight after that.

Which was being described here. Now, of course, Solomon, we know, wrote many songs. 1 Kings 4, verse 32 says, He spake 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

Now, some people have expressed surprise. You know, 1,000 is a nice round number, but 1,005 is a curious number. And it has been suggested by some that the additional five represent five sections into which the Song of Solomon might be divided or broken up.

Now, we have it in eight chapters, but you could, of course, chop the lines any way you like in the Song of Solomon and divide it up differently. There are different starting and stopping points in it, as we shall see shortly.

But his songs were 1,005. He spake of trees, the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that sprung it out of the wall. He spake of beasts and of fowl, or creeping things of the fishes.

[8 : 04] And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon from all kings of the earth, which he had heard, which had heard of his wisdom. So everything that he wrote, and all the songs that he wrote, he wrote with the wisdom and the inspiration which the Lord had given him.

In chapter 3 of 1 Kings, we read, The Lord says to Solomon, Behold, I have done according to thy words. Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, riches and honour, so that there shall not be among any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

And if thou walk in my ways to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father did, and did walk, then will I lengthen thy days. Now, this is one reason why we can be certain.

First of all, that the Song of Solomon is written with the divine inspiration and wisdom of God, which would preclude it from being simply a sort of anatomical kind of shallow description of physical relations.

[9 : 20] It has the wisdom of God and the inspiration of God behind it. But also, we must recognise it clearly, we speak to a time early in Solomon's reign.

Early in Solomon's reign, when this love of the Lord, such as his father David had, is still fresh in his mind, fresh in his heart. It has not yet become decayed and corrupted by the gods of the other nations round about, that eventually all his wives and concubines led him away too.

This is a song which focuses upon the love of the Lord for his people. And just as, amongst all the thousand and five songs that Solomon wrote, and we're told that he wrote, just as we have in scripture descriptions which imply that the best of the best, as the French would say, the *creme de la creme*, or cream of the cream.

So likewise, we have expressions like, you know, the holy of holies, king of kings. And thus we have here the Song of Songs. Amongst all other songs that Solomon ever wrote, this is the ultimate.

This is the language of the lover and the beloved. And it has been suggested, of course, that this is not one of its original contexts. It would simply be about a physical relation between Solomon and either Hale's daughter or others of his concubines or whatever it might have been.

[10 : 52] Well, it cannot be simply about one person. If you were to reduce it to the mere physical Solomon and one of the women from his harem or whatever, it moves in so many different places.

We move from the king's court to the shepherd's field, to the garden and the vineyard and the mountains and the fields. We have all these different geographical settings and locations.

And both the bride is described in different ways. Someone said, for example, verse 9 of chapter 1, for example, I have compared you, my love, to a company of horses and fields and chariots.

Ah, definitely talking about Pharaoh's daughter there. Well, not necessarily, no, because, you know, it's clearly what is described in previous verses. There is a shepherdess. You know, tell me, O thou whom I sold off, where thou feest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.

For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? Pharaoh's daughter is not going to be a shepherdess. Because we read in Genesis, remember, when Joseph entertains his brothers, verse 34 of Genesis 46.

[12 : 00] Then ye shall say, thy servants trade, hath been about cattle from our youth, even in town now, both we and also our fathers, that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen. For every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

So, Pharaoh's daughter is not going to be playing little bull peep with the shepherds and the lambs and so on. This is describing the beloved in different situations.

All the different situations which are pictured throughout the song. It is between the lover and the beloved. The intensity, the intimacy of, yes, the sanctified marriage bond.

Because remember that that is the illustration, that is the relationship that is used most often, not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old, to describe that relationship between God and his people.

Isaiah 54, verse 5. For thy maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth, shall he be called.

[13 : 07] Turn a couple of pages, chapter 62, and verse 5. For as a young man marieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee. And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

And from a slightly more negative perspective, in Jeremiah chapter 3, verse 1, they say, if a man threw away his wife, and she go from him and become another man's, shall he return to her again?

Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, and yet return again to thee, saith the Lord. It is the illustration of a marriage gone wrong and of multiple adulteries, and yet the Lord is saying, return to me.

Will the land be polluted? Yes, the land will be polluted. But God, as it were, takes that pollution upon himself. Just as when Joseph is convinced, naturally enough, that his espoused wife Mary has been unfaithful to him, that's why she's with child, and the angel appears to him, in Matthew chapter 1, of Moses says, don't be afraid to take Mary as that, my wife, because that which he's conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

So he takes her as his wife. So where does the reproach fall then? Yes, the reproach would have been on Mary, and he could have put her away quietly, but when he takes her as his wife, clearly with child, clearly not by him, the reproach, being the fool, falls upon him.

[14 : 41] He takes that upon himself. We read of Jesus, that when he heals the sick, and the lepers and the sword, himself bear our infirmities.

Yes, the land is polluted, and yes, when the Lord's people fail to be as faithful to him as they should be, there is pollution, there is sin, there is darkness, but the Lord, rather than banishing us, urges us in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, to return to him, and if there is reproach, he will bear it.

And if there is sin, and if there is suffering, and consequence, he will bear that. You know, remember how Paul writes to Philemon, and he says, you know, we'll take Onesimus back into your home, and if he has done you wrong, put that on my account.

Although I do not say to you, how you owe me, even your own self, to me besides, but that's what Paul says, you know, you owe me, Philemon, but let's not talk about that just now. If Onesimus was wrong, you put that on my account.

And so the Lord puts on his account, the guilt, the sin, the infirmities, that his own children are guilty of. So this song cannot be exclusively about any one person, if it were to be proven physical terms.

[16 : 02] It cannot simply be about one person in a hallium, for example, because the situations change across the song. And yet the song has certain natural breaks.

And others have said, oh, it's about a particular person, you know, at the end of chapter 6, verse 13, return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon thee.

Now, Shulamite simply means daughter of peace. It is the feminine of Solomon. Shulamite. It's the feminine of Solomon.

Solomon's bride, Solomon's wife, or by extension, God's bride. God's wife. This marriage relationship there is that which epitomizes God's relationship with his people.

Now, inevitably, in the marriage bond, which of course, remember, God is not hunting around for illustrations. He is not hunting around, saying, hmm, how will I like the relationship between you and my child?

[17:03] Hmm, let's think, oh, I know, think of it like marriage. But rather, he has created marriage. He has created man, male and female. Let us make man in our image.

And made them husband and wife in order to illustrate the intimacy between Christ and his church. The oneness, the unity, then becoming one in it.

So when he talks in Ephesians 5, for example, about husbands and wives and mutually submitting to one another, he makes it about Christ and his church.

Ephesians 5, 21, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Now, remember how we read elsewhere that when Christ has offered up all the world and brought all the world subdued unto himself, he then, as it were, offers up that perfect offering to the Father.

As it were, the Son submits to the Father, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.

[18:07] The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, and he's the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject to Christ, so that the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

It is Christ who purifies, sanctifies, saves his own church. This is the relation, the marriage bond between Christ and his church. Now, of course, it says in Genesis, the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed.

And clearly, part of the anatomical nature of the Song of Solomon is describing this kind of intimacy in which nevertheless, there is not shame or embarrassment, but there is rather being that.

Because in that level of intimacy, one is able to be vulnerable. One is able to be, in the literal, as well as in the spiritual sense, naked.

[19:21] And yet, we are not ashamed. Because the person before whom all our innermost thoughts, spirit, soul, and body is laid bare already knows us.

They already know us perfectly. They are already on our side. They already love us. It's okay to be vulnerable. It's okay to be, in that sense, naked.

And so, whilst there would be a certain embarrassment of the outside world, knowing or seeing us as we are, there is none in the company, the exclusive company of the beloved.

So, we have this again and again, this refrain throughout the song, this sense of falling asleep, as it were, with the beloved, allowing him to fall asleep.

Don't wake him. Shh. Don't wake him. And then the sense of the bride herself, or the beloved, waking up beside him, or with him, or something else waking. The voice of my beloved.

[20 : 24] He's coming, waking up on the mountain, skipping up on the earth. Who is this that comes out of the wilderness? Time and again. There is these breaks, as it were, in the song, which then, almost like somebody waking from sleep.

Having been with their beloved, they wake refreshed, they're delighted to be with the beloved again. You know, remember what Psalm 139 says, a verse taking, if I should count them, they are more number than the sand, than the thoughts of God.

When I awake, I am still with thee. And this is part of the beauty, of the consistency, of this relationship of the Lord to his people.

It's, this is not a world-like, worldly-like, one-night stand, where you wake up and the person's gone, and all our clothes are gone, and everything else. There's not no hint they were ever in the room and they're left, feeling used, and left, or whatever.

Rather, when I awake, I am still with thee. This is like the marriage bed, the marriage bond. You wake up, the beloved's still there. You roll over, they're still there. Day after day, night after night, there they are.

[21 : 28] The reassuring presence, the love, the intimacy, the unfolding of the one who never leaves us, nor forsakes us. And because this is about the Lord and his people, and because it has the intimacy, the unfolding, the strengthening, the supporting love of the Lord for his people, it speaks to all of his people, regardless of their earthbound marital status.

Whether they are married, or single, or widowed, or whatever the case may be, this is a sum of the love of the Lord for his people, to whom always thy maker is thine husband, regardless.

So we have this song of songs. It is about the love of the Lord. What could be greater? What could be better? As you have the King of Kings, as you have the Holy of Holies, so you have the song of songs.

Now, it has been suggested by some in the early church, but of the teachings of Solomon, that Ecclesiastes referred, if you like, to natural wisdom.

The natural way of things, observing things as they are. The Proverbs referred to the moral reality. It's full of soundbites, of advice, of what you should and shouldn't do, the moral good, and the moral way to follow, but that the song was the mystical wisdom about the union of God and his people of Christ and his church.

[23 : 00] To the Jews, they liken it at some points in their history as like, as though Proverbs, was the outer court of the temple. Ecclesiastes, revealing of it more, as they thought, was like the court of the priests or the holy place.

But again, the song was like the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum, where only the high priest lived on. So there's this illustrative power in it.

There's this allegory that it cannot be a mere physical description. And because of this, some commentators would say there's absolutely nothing literal in it at all.

That might be stretching it. There's probably some of what Solomon experiences in his marriage or marriages if we can say that. In the early days when the love of the Lord is still fresh, the delight that he still takes in the Lord and what the Lord has given him, probably there is some of what he is experiencing suggests itself to him in the ways that he describes the intimacy and love of the Lord.

But some commentators would say there's nothing literal in this. It is all spiritual, all allegory. Well, you know, that might be one reason why there is no mention of the Lord.

[24 : 21] There's no mention of God explicitly. In the sum of Solomon, he's not mentioned at all because this is not teaching about God. This is not, if you like, pointing us in a sense toward a distant part of a way, God.

This is, if you like, the marriage bed of the Lord and his people. He is right there. He is right involved, close with them. You don't have to talk about him at a distance.

He is there. He is there. He is the beloved. He is the lover. And so we find this song to be all about the Lord, all about his love for his people.

Now, as we've said, there are certain natural breaks throughout the song, as some would suggest. We have our own chapter divisions, but, you know, as we've said, chapter 2, verse 7, I charge you, you daughters of Jerusalem, by the rows and the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor awake my love till he please.

And then, as though awakened up by the voice of my beloved, that's what I wake up to, the most wonderful sound, the voice of my beloved. Chapter 3, again, verse 5, the same thing.

[25 : 30] I charge you, you daughters of Jerusalem, by the rows and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor awake my love till he please. And then, who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, waking up and seeing the beloved coming, as it were, from a distance.

And then, it is as though the beloved himself is speaking when she says, you know, awake not when calm was out, let the wind blow up on the spices of my garden, let it flow out and draw in the beloved.

And he says, I've come into my garden, chapter 5, verse 1, I've come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. I've gathered my myrrh with my spice. I've eaten my honeycomb with my honey.

I've drunk my wine with my milk. I've taken everything to prepare for me. Now, eat, eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. And the other thing, again, chapter 8, verse 4, as we say, there's more breaks, there again, of a similar nature, charge your daughters of Jerusalem, don't awake, my beloved, until he peases.

The other thing you should notice is how frequently this reference, my sister, my spouse, occurs. Now, your sister is not your spouse. You know, you don't feel about your sister in the way that you do about the love of your life.

[26 : 43] But on the other hand, this I would suggest to you is illustrative of the purity, the spiritual nature of this lover and beloved relationship.

It is all about the purity, the celestial purity that exists between Christ and his people. You see, if we were to take, we're not going to go into chapter 1, Lord willing, we'll do that next time around.

If you wanted to think of a verse that this, tonight's thoughts would be about, would simply be verse 1, this song of songs. The ultimate expression of singing to the beloved.

Let him kiss me and the kisses of his mouth. Thy love is better than wine because of the singer of thy good ordinance. Thy name is his ultimate. Quote, therefore do the virgins love thee. Those who have not engaged in any physical, manic activity, they're still pure, they're still, if we can use that expression, unspoiled.

They are not entering into any physical relations with any man, we could say a woman, either, in that sense. So those who don't have the matters of physical intimacy on their minds, they love you with this purity, with this desire.

[27 : 57] Therefore, because of the savor of my good ordinance, thy name, is the song I came over, and the very name of Jesus is sweet, is positively, positively stirs up the heart.

Therefore, do the virgins love thee. The purest of the pure love the Lord with all their heart and soul and man and spirit. And this, of course, is part of the joy and the purity of the relationship with Christ.

If I can say it rhetorically, it is nevertheless truthful. Jesus, in his earthly ministry, had women literally falling at his feet.

They fell at his feet to touch the hem of his garment. They fell at his feet to weep over his feet and anoint him with extensive oil. They fell at his feet to plead for the life of their child and their daughter.

Women fell at Jesus' feet on a regular basis. But never do we find him interpreting that in terms of, yeah, I must be really a man.

[29 : 00] Of course, women want me. Of course, they desire me. Yes, they do, but not that way. This is a completely different kind of world. Infinitely higher than the base animal instincts by which we are so often moved in this world.

Now, if you were to put it just in earthly flesh, he kind of, oh yeah, women fell at Jesus' feet. There would be plenty of men in this world who think, oh, what was his secret? I wonder, if only we could do that too so that they could abuse that power and reduce it to that which is merely power.

But the power that Jesus has, the draw that he has, is that which even the virgins love thee, the pure in heart love thee, the pure in mind love thee, the very soul, the spirit loves thee.

And because there is this draw, because there is this spiritual magnetism of Jesus, that that which is purest and best and most yearning in each of us is inexorably drawn to Christ.

And the things of the flesh, well, they're way behind. They're just like the muddy walk over. They're just not there in terms of this desire.

[30 : 20] And yet, we can speak of desire, we can speak of love, we can speak of longing, we can speak of delight in one another in these terms, and it remains untainted by the fallen, carnal, abusive, often, kind of way in which these things are understood in this world.

So this is an allegory. It is a description of Christ's love for his church, of God's love for his people, both in an Old and in a New Testament context, that even it has been suggested by some, probably with good reason, that it is also at times looking forward toward the time when, although it is all Israel at this point, when the Gentiles shall be brought in.

You know, verse 8 of chapter 8, we have a little sister and she hath no breast. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? In other words, when it comes time for her to be married, how do we prepare her?

What shall we do that she shall be best prepared? She's not at that stage just now. She's a child. She's a little child. She's not ready for marriage. It's not even in her mind at this stage.

And they have likened this, perhaps I think with good reason, to the church, the spiritual Israel, looking forward to the time when the Gentiles shall be brought in.

[31 : 47] We have a little sister. She's too young to be married. She's a child. The Gentiles are not yet ready to be given to the Messiah. They are not yet ready to receive the engrafting into the holy vine of the people of God of Israel.

They're there. They exist. But they're not at marriageable age. They're not at that stage yet. It's not yet time for the Gentiles to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

And yet we have here Solomon inspired inspired by God's wisdom to look ahead with this allegory, with this illustration, to look ahead to the time when the bride of Christ shall include those as yet spiritually unprepared, as yet, in a sense, too young.

Not yet their time, but their time would come. Just as the time for each of the Lord's people shall come and does come. Unless the Lord should come very, very soon, it is reasonable to suppose that there will be many, perhaps, multitudes who are not even yet conceived or born who will one day be the Lord's, who will one day be with Him in glory.

And if we are in Christ, He will be with us in glory. They have yet to be conceived. They have yet to be born. They have yet to be brought into this world. They are not yet ready for this marriage to the Lamb that their day will come.

[33 : 18] And the song looks forward to it as it looks forward to our day. Now, Lord willing, if we are spared, we will look through the different chapters, the different sections, the different allegories and illustrations of this most spiritual and most beloved of songs in which the language of the beloved and the language of the lover is set forth most perfectly in that of which we need never be afraid the word of God.

That is fine.