

RIGHTEOUS ROMANCE

Song of Songs – Various Verses

One of the most abused or perhaps misused words in the English language is the word “love.” It is used to describe a variety of emotions and passions that range from the most noble to the ignoble. The idea of “romantic love” tends toward the concept of infatuation or even borders on being total absorbed by thoughts of the “object” of such love. It is akin to the “mountain top” experience of exhilaration and being caught up in a state of euphoria. It is like a narcotic that takes control of our feelings and actions.

These ideas are captured in the lyrics of the theme song of a 1955 Oscar-winning movie entitled *Love Is a Many-splendored Thing*.

Love is a many splendored thing, It's the April rose that only grows in the early spring, Love is nature's way of giving a reason to be living, The golden crown that makes a man a king.

Once on a high and windy hill, In the morning mist two lovers kissed and the world stood still, When our fingers touch, my silent heart has taught us how to sing, Yes, true love's a many splendored thing.

The Song of Solomon captures these heightened emotions and presents them in a story of a beautiful young woman who is “in love” with a shepherd who responds in love so that a relationship develops that ends with her becoming his bride and the marriage being consummated.

Warren Weirsbe has noted that there are several storyline interpretations of this drama. Any of these interpretations are plausible and do not detract from the beauty of the story and the lessons to be learned. There are also many situations presented that can be seen as relating to the relationship of Christ and His church.

One literal interpretation finds three main characters in the story: the young Shulammitte woman, a young shepherd with whom she is in love, and Solomon. In this version, Solomon meets the lovely maiden while on one of his trips to examine his lands and takes her to his palace. There she can think only of her beloved back home. She tells the women of the harem (“daughters of Jerusalem”) not to try to persuade her to forsake her true love. In 2:8–3:5 she recalls her beloved and even has a dream about him. Solomon visits her (3:6–4:16) to try to win her love, but she cannot forget her beloved back home. Her beloved sees her in a dream (5:1–6:3). Again, the king tries to win her (6:4–7:9), but the maiden refuses (7:10–8:3). She is not impressed with the king’s wealth, spices, lands, or flattery. Finally, true love wins out and the maiden is set free. She flees to her beloved (8:4–14) and is restored to her family again. A similar story of just two characters finds Solomon and the young woman with Solomon being seen as both the shepherd and the king.

A historical interpretation is that the Jews saw this love poem as a picture of the relationship between God and Israel. Israel was “wedded” to the Lord at Mt. Sinai, when the nation accepted the Law. Israel was not faithful to her Divine Husband and “played the harlot” with the idolatrous nations of the world. She turned her back on her Beloved. However, there will come a day when, like the maiden in Song of Solomon, Israel will return home and be restored to her Beloved.

The typical interpretation is that these writings describe the relationship between Christ and the church, collectively and individually. Just as husband and wife are “one” and belong to each other, so Christ and His church are one. He is in us, we are in Him. He loved us (past tense) and showed this love by dying for us on the cross. He loves us (present tense) and shows this love by caring for us, nourishing us through the Word, and seeking to make us as beautiful spiritually as possible. In the future He will continue to love us and we will share His glory in eternity. The “marriage of the Lamb” is coming (Rev. 19:7–9). Christ shall return in glory and

take His bride to heaven.

In a practical sense, this book presents a vivid picture of faithful love and deepening communion. The intimate terms used only illustrate the wonderful love between Christ and the Christian. Love and marriage illustrate the Christian life in that in salvation we are married to Christ. In dedication we belong to each other and no sacrifice is too great. In communion, we find the intimate fellowship that is pictured in the relationship of the lovers in the Song of Songs. The coming glorification that awaits the church is a picture of the consummation of the marriage.

It's About Being Together – 1:7-8

⁷ “Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, Where do you pasture your flock, Where do you make it lie down at noon? For why should I be like one who veils herself Beside the flocks of your companions?” ⁸ “If you yourself do not know, Most beautiful among women, Go forth on the trail of the flock And pasture your young goats By the tents of the shepherds. Song of Solomon 1:7–8 (NASB95)

These two verses are a dialogue between the Shulammitte woman and the shepherd with whom she is in love or with the women of Solomon's harem. In the overall context of the story she had already been taken by Solomon to his harem and is among the “daughters of Jerusalem,” yet she wants to return to the one she loves who is tending his sheep in the hill country. She either sent a message to him to determine where he shelters his flock to provide protection from the noonday heat or asked the question aloud in the hearing of the “daughters of Jerusalem” who represent the alternative of what the world offers.

She does not ask where he shelters the sheep at night because she wants their meeting to have the benefit of being in the light and not in darkness. She does not want anyone to question her motives for seeking out the shepherd. She does not have any hidden agenda such as some “veiled women” who might make visits to the sheep folds at night. Apparently, prostitutes would follow the shepherds and make themselves available at night. The young Shulammitte woman wanted to find the shepherd and be with him simply because she loved him – no ulterior motive.

If this story is truly representative of Christ and an individual believer, then we could make the argument that a “true” believer seeks Christ and becomes part of a local body of believers for no other motive than his or her love for Him. There may be a multitude of reasons a person would join themselves to Christ in a local church and these might even sound quite noble such as, “I want to give my family and my children the benefit of being part of the church. This will give the kids a chance to learn about God so they can make a decision later on in life if they want to be a Christian.” Some might even become part of a church to be able to help their business and find clients. I have known of people who were attempting to get elected to a political office becoming more active in the church. The only legitimate reason for being a Christian is that we love the Lord.

The answer we find in verse eight can be interpreted in a least two ways. If the answer was coming from her true love, then we could say that in order to find the “right shepherd,” then she should look to see where the true sheep are going and that will lead her to the one she loves. That seems somewhat unlikely since just checking out the sheep and following them has the possibility of leading her astray and to the wrong shepherd since most sheep look very similar. Another possibility is that the one who seeks Christ can find Him by following godly examples as in the case of Paul advising his reader to follow him as he follows Christ.

Is that not what many people do today? They realize the need for some spiritual element in their lives and they may just go where they see other people going and miss out on finding the “Good Shepherd.” It is very important to know that those whom they are following are not false teachers but are genuine and true believers who are bearing the fruit of righteousness.

If the answer to her question came from the women of the harem, then their reply would be somewhat cynical and disdainful advice that would tell the young woman to “just look where the sheep are and just pick any of the shepherds because there is no difference among them.” This is like saying that there is no difference in the various religions of the world. You have probably heard those who claim that all religions lead to God and the outcome will be the same in the end. They may have even been implying that since she came out of an agriculture area of vineyards and shepherds and she herself had taken care of a herd of young goats that she should return to that life and just fit into the world from which she came.

Mutual Admiration – 1:15-2:2

¹⁵ “, How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves.” ¹⁶ “, How handsome you are, my beloved, And so pleasant! Indeed, our couch is luxuriant! ¹⁷ “The beams of our houses are cedars, Our rafters, cypresses. ¹ “I am the rose of Sharon, The lily of the valleys.” ² “Like a lily among the thorns, So is my darling among the maidens.” Song of Solomon 1:15–2:2 (NASB95)

It is not at all clear as to whether this dialogue is between the young Shulammitte woman and Solomon or her true love (the young shepherd) whom she had longed to be with. What is clear is that the descriptions of the male are applicable to Christ and those of the female apply to the church or the Bride of Christ during what is commonly referred to as the Church Age.

As is typical of two people in love with each other, they admire and compliment each other with tender expressions. In an earlier verse the young woman had noted that she was dark or tanned by the sun because she had been working in the sun tending vineyards and shepherding young goats. In a spiritual context we could say that she was exposed to and had been darkened by the world system. While having a nice tan is desirable today; it that day, “proper ladies” avoided the sun and valued a fair or light skin tone. When the male (either Solomon or her beloved shepherd) spoke of her, he noted that she was fair, which has been translated in the more modern versions as “beautiful.” The use of this adjective misses the reference to her previously expressed concern about being darkened by the sun.

There is probably some significance in the repeating of the statement that the maiden was fair or beautiful. When statements are repeated, the intent is to give emphasis to the truth of the statement. Comparing her eyes to doves may be nothing more than romanticism, but there could be a reference to her eyes having a quality of innocence. It is said that the eyes are windows of the soul and so there could be further meaning when applied to the church in that our souls have been influenced and impacted by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which is pictured as a dove in various places in the Scriptures.

The young woman has words of admiration for the “one she loves” and she used the same adjective “fair” to describe him. One could make the argument that as the intended bride of Christ we are to have the same qualities as our Lord. In addition to his being fair or handsome, she described him as being delightful or pleasant as opposed to being harsh and demanding as some men were prone to be. In a spiritual sense, we find that many of the religions of the world are harsh and demanding while in Christ we find that our God has qualities of a loving Father.

The place where the two lovers met was described as a luxuriant or (literally) green couch. If the intended meaning was, in fact, green, then we could easily see that the plans she had to go to the meadow to find her beloved had come about and they were embracing on the green grass. This idea would have confirmation if the beams and rafters were literally cedar trees and cypress (or fir) trees which would imply that they were outside in a pastoral setting rather than in the residence of Solomon in Jerusalem.

The outdoor setting might also explain the description the young woman has of her self. In a modest response to the shepherd’s admiring words that she was fair or beautiful, she

compared herself to a common rose and a lowly lily that grows in the wilderness. Many people think that “Rose of Sharon” and “Lily of the valleys” is a reference to Christ as being ultimately beautiful. That is wrong on both accounts. First, it is a statement of modesty and being “common” rather than “extraordinary” and, second, it was made in reference to the woman.

The shepherd’s response was that if she saw herself as a common lily, then she was a lily among thorns. This was to imply that he saw her beauty as being as far and above that of all the other women he had seen. The spiritual implication of this view is that we may see ourselves simply as a “sinner saved by grace” and that we do not have any kind of special goodness that would merit our salvation. On the other hand, God sees us as “the righteousness of Christ” and sees that we are being transformed into the bride of Christ “without spot or wrinkle.”

Be on Guard – 2:15

¹⁵ “Catch the foxes for us, The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, While our vineyards are in blossom.” Song of Solomon 2:15 (NASB95)

In the larger passage (of which verse 15 is a part) the young woman was speaking by telling us what her beloved had said to her. Starting in verse ten of this chapter, we find him calling to her to follow him since winter was past and new life was starting to emerge. This would represent the early call of Christ to His church to enter into a new life relationship with Him following the winter of legalism that had prevailed for centuries in Israel. He would be going into the high country and she would find shelter in him in the same way doves find shelter in the clefts of the rocks that are along the path or stairs that lead to the higher plane. Along the way, the vines are in bloom in anticipation of the fruit that will be borne on them. Her beloved instructed her that now was the time to “catch the foxes” that will ruin the vineyard once the grapes have formed. In her earlier life with her brothers, she had failed to take proper care of the vineyard and she admitted in verse 1:6 that she had not taken care of her vineyard. That may be a reference to the failure that Israel had experienced as a nation and now the church was being warned to not make the same error.

The spiritual application of this for the church is that we need to be on guard against false teachers who would try to destroy the church and its mission by taking people from “salvation by grace through faith” and return to a “salvation by works” approach. For individual Christians, the lesson to be learned is that little and subtle sins will separate us from the intimate and close relationship that we desire to have with the Lord. These “little foxes” that spoil the grapes diminish the fruitfulness of our being in the vine. These little, subtle sins began early in our walk with the Lord (while the vineyards are in blossom) and are to be eliminated (by us) while we are still in the early stages of our spiritual development. (The truth of this teaching also applies very appropriately to the husband and wife relationship in marriage, in that many times it is the petty and seemingly insignificant things harm the relationship of intimacy in the relationship.)

Treasure the Treasures – 4:9-12

⁹ “You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, With a single strand of your necklace. ¹⁰ “How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, And the fragrance of your oils Than all kinds of spices! ¹¹ “Your lips, my bride, drip honey; Honey and milk are under your tongue, And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. ¹² “A garden locked is my sister, my bride, A rock garden locked, a spring sealed up. Song of Solomon 4:9–12 (NASB95)

All of chapter four is focused on the wedding night. It starts out with the groom complimenting the beauty of his bride and admiring her physical characteristics such as her eyes, hair, neck, etc. He then invites her to abandon all her past and forget all her fears and concerns

and come with him into the experience of wedding bliss. We pick up the words of admiration starting in verse nine in which the groom switches from his admiration of her external attributes to that of the quality of her love.

We have noted in other contexts of Scripture that God looks upon the heart and not on the external actions or appearances although the external appearances are important and can be representative of what is in the heart. The outward actions of a Christian should be “provocative” in the sense of the fruit of spirit, the fruit of righteous, and the fruit of grace as seen in our lives should draw people to Christ.

The groom’s comment that just one glance of his bride’s eye or just seeing a single strand of her necklace, his heart was “stolen” (NIV) or he was “emboldened” (YLT) or “stirred in his heart” (NASB). The reason that this would happen to him was because he knew the nature of the love that was the source of her beauty. She had a love that was pure and without ulterior motive and he found that to be more intoxicating and inviting than wine.

Returning to the idea of Christ and His church, we could easily make the argument that Christ knows the kind of love that is within those who are born again of the Spirit of God because it is the “love of God” that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us. This was the reason He came and died and He is elated when a person who was once lost in the world responds in faith and receives and walks in that salvation.

Oil was the symbol used in ceremonies where people were anointed and we see that the Bride has been anointed with an oil that produces a sweet-smelling perfume that cannot be duplicated by the chemicals and spices of the world. This sweet smelling savor is a result of being engulfed by the Holy Spirit and the perfume may be related to the Fruit of the Spirit or the prayers of the saints that are like incense rising to God.

The groom was delighted in the sweetness of his bride’s lips and her mouth. The spiritual application is that the words that come from our lips should be produced from the abundance of what is in our hearts. And since Christ is in our hearts, then the fruit of our lips should certainly be pleasant.

The smell of garments can be significantly influence by what it was washing in, where it had been stored, who may have worn it and by anything that is deliberately added to the garment such as perfumes. For the Christian we have been given garments that have been cleansed by the blood just as Aaron’s priestly garment was sprinkled with the blood of the altar and with the ointments. Also, when Aaron was anointed the perfumed oil that was poured out upon him ran down upon his garments.

The reference to Lebanon is likely related to the aromatic cedars that grow there. Closets lined with cedar are used to preserve clothing by protecting it from moths. We find that the clothing of the saints in heaven will be a white robe that is preserved (stored away) for them. We can also find a connection to a parable that Jesus shared (Matthew 22) regarding those who were invited to and attended a wedding feast. In this parable, the importance of those attending being properly attired in a suitable wedding garment was emphasized.

The implication of the bride being a “locked garden” speaks of the exclusivity of the relationship the bride is to have with the groom. Just as God insisted on the faithfulness of Israel in the Old Testament, we see that same requirement in our relationship to Christ. We are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and we are to show our love through obedience to the teachings of Christ and we see that the First Commandment that God gave on Mount Sinai has not been repealed.