

Song of Songs

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[0:00] Well, all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

agree with the Holy Spirit. We wouldn't say that out and out, of course, but we do it by segregating some parts of the scripture by putting them into a forbidding corner where they're too hard, they're too complicated, and we say, well, I just can't get anything out of that.

Why bother reading it? And to a certain degree, I definitely want to say that that is totally understandable because we do need to be taught. Not everything is easily understood. It's not all on the surface. Some parts aren't very accessible, and we don't know what to make of them.

And so I want to remedy that a little bit over the next few months in these afternoon services. I just want to preach a brief series called Taking Back Your Bible. We're just going to cover four or five of some of the harder books. I'm not going to give you all the answers. I'm not going to give you all the details. I'm not going to answer all the questions, but my goal is just pretty simple.

I want to encourage you to read these books. They're not always the ones that we navigate to, but they're nevertheless still, in God's Word, they're still useful for us. And so I kind of want them, I want them to be not so intimidating. So we want to take back our Bible out of that forbidden corner and maybe enjoy it for the first time. Today I decided that we're going to start with the book of Song of Songs. And the reason is for starting here is because we're finishing a series on Sunday school on marriage. And we've had a wedding recently. We're going to have more weddings coming up.

[2:16] And so I thought now is as good a time as any to dive into this book and help you to learn how to read it. And so let me say at the beginning that I really love this book. I love it. It's fun.

I know that's not always the description, but it's fun. It's romantic. It's realistic. It's enjoyable. It's full of wisdom and grace. And it's a beautiful, beautiful book. And I would just simply be delighted if you went away from here and said, I want to read that book. I want to read it and understand it. But like I said, it's different. It's not exactly accessible. It's not like most of the other scriptures. And so it can be a bit daunting. We're not used to it. And so I'm going to give you four words, four handles, or four different sets of lenses to look through so that you can, as you just read it, you can maybe put it into these different categories. Or as you're thinking, you could address it through these different lenses. And the first word is poetry.

First word is poetry. So turn with me to the Song of Songs, if you're not there. It's right before Isaiah. It's right after Ecclesiastes. Song of Songs is poetry. To be specific, it's love poetry. And in God's opinion, it's the best love poetry ever written. That's why it's called the Song of Songs.

So the King of Kings is the greatest King. The Lord of Lords is the highest Lord. And the Song of Songs is the greatest of all songs. And we don't sing prose. We sing poetry. And that's what we have here.

And that means when you come to the Song of Songs, you must read it like poetry. What does that mean? It means you have to read it and hear it with both your mind and your emotions engaged. It's not logical. It's not like a Pauline argument. The song creates a beautiful, magical, romantic world that you step into. That's how poetry works. It brings you into a world.

[4:36] Two roads diverged in a yellow wood. And sorry, I could not travel both. And be one traveler, long I stood and looked down one as far as I could to where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other as just as fair and having perhaps the better claim because it was grassy and wanted wear, though as far for that the passing there had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay in leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I marked the first for another day. Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I ever should come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh somewhere ages and ages hence. Two roads diverged in a wood. And I, I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference. What happens in good poetry? Well, hopefully, as I read Robert Frost, you entered into the world of the poem. And it didn't just convey ideas or words. There were pictures there. And there were feelings.

[5 : 49] And together it gave you meaning. And it gave you more meaning than a lecture could. It, in such tight confines, it made a whole world come alive. And that's what the Song of Songs is like.

It's a collection of love poems between two lovers, a man and his wife. And as they speak, we're brought into their world. And that world, it's the world that their love is created. And it's a wonderful world. And that's one reason that the Song of Songs is so hard to preach. I've heard several sermon series on the Song of Songs. And it's, it's never, I've never been completely satisfied. Because kind of what happens is that when you pull it apart, and you nail it down, and you tear it apart, and you describe all the different metaphors, there, it loses its poetic quality. And so the world of the poem that we find there is, is turned rather black and white. And so it's really good to read the Song of Songs.

Just read it from front to back, and start over again until you're used to the ideas. And you might need help here and there. You might. But it's best to come back and to be immersed in it. So that's kind of what I want to say at the very beginning. It is accessible if you spend time in it. And that's how you should be looking at it. It's a collection of love poems. Now, some people, very smart, very godly people, have thought of it as an allegory. And that's traditionally been the church's opinion, or even the Old Testament scholar's opinion. It's an allegory of God's love for Israel. It's an allegory of Jesus' love for the church. And for generations, that's how people have thought about it. And the problem is, it doesn't really feel like an allegory. Now, what's the most famous of all allegories? It's probably Pilgrim's Progress. And the Song of Songs isn't really much like that. They're both very different.

And so I think that's the best. That's why I think it's best to think of it as just a group of love poems that are connected by different themes and ideas. And since it's poetry, that means it's full of metaphors. It's full of pictures, word pictures. And those pictures can be really strange to us. So what are we going to do with those? Well, turn over to chapter 7, verse 4. We're going to just look at some. We don't want to, I'm not going into any depth here. Chapter 7, verse 4. The man is describing his wife, his beautiful bride. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the pools of Heshbon by the gates of Bath-Rabim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, looking toward Damascus.

[8 : 42] So what do you do when you come across those pictures? Well, first, men, you don't repeat them to your wife. It doesn't work. I've tried. Well, what do you do then? I think it's a simple enough answer. You remember that this is love poetry. And whatever they're saying, they're saying something lovely about their spouse, their lover, their friend. And whatever it means, he's complimenting her.

And whatever it means, it doesn't mean she has a neck like a giraffe, and she cries all the time, and her nose is formidable. It's not that. He's saying something very beautiful. And that's how you want to address it. It's love poetry. It's love poetry. Now, the second word is wisdom.

Wisdom. The Song of Songs is wisdom literature. It's meant to teach you how to live in God's grace, under God's grace, in a sinful, fallen world. That's what wisdom is. It's day-to-day, nitty-gritty, how to live under God's grace in a sinful, fallen world. And so that means the song is meant to teach you how to enjoy a happy, romantic, sexually satisfying marriage between two sinners in a fallen world. Now, this poem isn't, it's not all, you know, flowers and bunnies hopping through the forest. They fight. The couples fight, and they want each other at the wrong time, and their love grows cold, and then it comes back again. And that's supposed to teach us wisdom.

We have a lot of wrong ideas about what romantic marriage is going to be like, and the Song of Songs is going to teach us reality. And then it also teaches us and shows us that we can be too spiritual for our own good, even. There's been a long, long history of looking down at God's good gift of sex, and the song comes in, as it were, with Cupid's arrow and kills that idea dead. The song is full of sensuality. It's full of, and what I mean is bodily things. They eat, they drink, they walk around in forests and meadows, and there's apple trees and flowers. It's a world where there's smell, and there's taste, and there's sights, and there's sounds, and it's a world to enjoy. And like the book of Ecclesiastes, it reminds us that there is a fake spirituality out there that is miles away

from what God's whole view of godliness is all about, God's idea of godliness. A great deal of God's idea of godliness is enjoying his gifts, enjoying his good gifts, and marital love is one of the best. So the song gives married couples wisdom, wisdom. But that's not all that it's designed to do. It's designed to give singles, unmarried, young people wisdom. The whole song is sung, and the whole, it's like a little play acted out in front of an audience of young ladies, and they show up in the song every now and then. And so at least three times, the woman, the wife, turns away from her lover, and she turns to these young ladies and says, I charge you by the gazelles and the does of the field, do not arouse or awaken love until it desires. In other words, wait, wait. And you see, the song, it wants to keep young people pure, and it doesn't do it by saying, thou shall not commit adultery.

[12 : 43] Instead, it works by saying, look, young people, this is worth waiting for. This is something that's worth protecting. This is something worth saving yourself for.

Everything else is just pathetic, dirty, tawdry, dangerous, and so the word comes again and again to young people. Wait. Just wait.

Wait for the proper time. And that's why, parents, it's a good idea to go through this song with your children, or with your teens, we'll say. So before you go to Dr. Dobson and any other good book, go to God's book about sex and romance and marriage, and you're going to find something beautiful there.

It's going to be something that's pure and good and winsome, and that's what they're trying to do. They're trying to show them, this is what the ideal is. This is what is best. And show them what could be theirs by God's grace.

So it's trying to paint a beautiful picture to win the hearts of young people to purity. That's the second word. It's wisdom. It gives wisdom to marrieds.

[13 : 51] It gives wisdom to singles. Here's the third word, redemption. Redemption. Redemption. Through the life and death of Jesus Christ, God redeems marriage.

So we go back to Genesis 2. Genesis 2. And what was it like? Well, Adam and Eve are in the garden.

They were in a garden. There are fruit trees everywhere. There's food readily available. There's sights and smells. There's sounds. There's things to enjoy. And they're naked and without shame. And then something bad happened. Adam and Eve fell. And they sinned. And immediately, there was a distance in their relationship. Immediately, the marriage started unraveling.

And they're falling apart. They looked. And they saw that they were naked. They've always been naked. But now they see it for the first time. And they can't stand another person looking at them. They felt dirty and exposed.

[14 : 55] And so they're quick. And they're sewing clothes on. And they're hiding behind the trees. Because for the first time, when sin came in, there was fear. And there was shame. And there was distance. And then God took them out of the garden.

Kicked them out of the garden. But he promised a Savior. He promised a Redeemer. And it's by faith in that Savior. It's by faith in the Lord Jesus.

That in part, these married couples actually get back, in part, into the garden. And that's what we see in this book. So you see beautiful garden imagery.

See, these two lovers that we find in this book, they're forgiven sinners. They're forgiven sinners. And that's why they're not hiding anymore. Because they're justified. They've been declared righteous.

And that's why they can express themselves without shame. And that's why they can uncover themselves without embarrassment. And that's, they can get back into the garden in some way. So listen, just to the garden imagery.

[15 : 56] I could have really picked out any number of passages. Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride. Milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon.

So we're talking cedars. You're a garden locked up, my sister, my bride. You are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.

You are a garden fountain and a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon. So do you hear all the garden imagery? The song produces a world.

It shows us a world where two people who were once ashamed and once who had distance have now been washed and they are ready again to enjoy life together under God's blessing.

And so through Christ, marriage becomes a place where you can come home to. Where, see, we've all, ever since we've been out of the garden, we've had this restless homelessness to us.

[17:09] And so through Christ, we are brought some way back in. And so it's a place where marriage becomes a place where the husband wants to come home to. This is home to him.

He says, I just want to be with her. When I'm with her, I'm at home. I could be miles and miles away from my house. I could be in all sorts of situations. But when I'm with her, I'm home.

And the wife can say the same thing about her husband. And the reason all that has happened is because of what Christ has done. He's redeemed marriage and he's made it into a place where people can thrive again.

And so what I'm saying, as you read Song of Songs, realize this marriage, this kind of marriage just doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen like that.

It's not possible in our own strength. Jesus must save. Jesus must deliver us. Jesus must, like we were talking about from Zechariah 3, taking off our sinful clothes and dressing us in his glorious clothes.

[18:11] If he doesn't do that spiritual work, then you're forever going to be hiding from each other. You're going to be forever protecting yourself and sewing up your fig leaves. And you'll never be free to have the kind of intimacy and openness and enjoyment that these two lovers have.

And so what I'm saying is when you're reading this, think about Jesus. Praise Jesus. Thank him.

See his work. Turn away from your own fig leaves and turn to his righteousness.

Rest in what he's done. And as you learn to rest in more and more in what he's done and how he's covered you, that kind of marriage will become less of a dream and more of a reality.

Now here's the fourth word in the final. It's union. Union. Ephesians 5, Ephesians 5, tells us that every marriage is a picture of Christ's love and union with the church.

It tells us of the kind of union that we have with our lover, with Jesus. And so as you read the Song of Songs, it opens up to you, it uncovers a picture of the kind of union that we have and enjoy with Jesus Christ as the church.

[19:31] It's a living union. It's an affectionate relationship. And I think if you think about it and as you dwell on it, you realize that it's a union where we're mutually attracted to each other.

This is the gospel. This is wonderful news. Yeah, the church is attracted to Jesus. He's altogether lovely. His name is like perfume poured out.

He's radiant and glorious. But we also see something else, that Jesus is attracted to his church. The attraction is not a one-way street. It goes both ways.

She was ugly. She was dirty. She was unholy. But by his grace, she's been washed. And she's been made radiant and clean. And one day, she is going to be holy and blameless before him. And he's attracted to her. He wants to be with her. And so this is where the song reaches to both married and singles.

[20:33] The song tells us of a love that Christ has for his people. It pictures it. And it pictures however dimly what we are going to be enjoying forever and ever.

And so remember, there's a marriage supper coming. There's a marriage supper coming. And if there's a marriage supper, that means there's going to be a marriage. And that's what we're looking forward to.

Well, I don't want to take any more time. But here's my application. Read it. Read it. And as you do, remember four things. Poetry. It's poetry.

It's wisdom. We're talking about redemption. And it expresses union. And so read it and enjoy it. It really is wonderful. You're not going to understand all of it the first time.

You might need some help every now and then. But read it and enjoy it. And the second is, if you're a married couple, try reading it as a couple. And let the pictures, let the words, let the ideas flow into your marriage and purify it and make it something more and more beautiful.

[21:42] And I think if you read it together, one to each other, you're going to laugh and you're going to giggle and all that. I mean, it's just going to happen. But it's okay. Because God is good.

He's given us this wonderful gift of marriage. And it's meant to be enjoyed. And so how do we honor him for that? Well, we take it. And we take the cup.

And we drink it. We enjoy it. And he's given us this wonderful, exhilarating thing called marriage to many of us. And so how do we honor him for it? We take it.

We thank him. And we drink it. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the giver of all good gifts.

Marriage is a good gift. Singleness is a good gift. Help us to see your kind hand in whatever you have given to us.

[22:45] Help us to learn to enjoy the cup that you have put before us. Not to put bitterness into it where there is no bitterness. Not to mix it with unbelief and disappointment if we are single or if we are married in situations that are less than ideal.

I pray, Lord, that we would learn to take the cup that you have put before us and drink it. For many of us, you have given us wonderful marriages, spouses that love you, and that we have true, deep union in Christ.

And I thank you for those. And I pray that you would take your word as we find it in the book of Song of Songs and use it to change us.

Use it to make us more godly. Lord, we thank you that you have called us to yourself.

marriage supper coming, and an eternity of marriage and honeymoon and working and enjoying life with you. Lord, I pray that you would refresh us at the thought of it.

[24:00] Refresh us in our marriages and bless us. Bless us as we go on our way. In Jesus' name, amen.