

The Communion of Love

Song of Solomon – Chapter 3: v.6 – 5: v.1

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

The Bible book entitled Song of Solomon is a beautiful piece of love poetry. Perhaps that is one thing that all the commentators might agree on! Historically, most Bible commentators treated the book as purely allegorical, that is, they believed that it used picture language to represent God's love for His people and was not to be taken literally as an account of love between a man and a woman. The majority of expositors today, regard the book as being about love between man and woman, although they disagree significantly about who the man and woman in the book really were! Perhaps many of them would accept that it is a reasonable application of the book to see lessons about the love that God has for His people and vice versa.

My personal view is that since the Bible makes it very clear that the relationship between husband and wife is a beautiful picture of that between Christ and His church, there is no problem in seeing applications of this lovely book to both human and divine affection. The last twelve verses of Ephesians chapter five spell this out most plainly including, in verse 25, the well-known exhortation for,

“Husbands [to] love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”,

and verse 32 where, speaking about how a married couple become one flesh, the apostle declares,

“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

I would say that, as Genesis 2 sets out, in making Eve out of Adam while he slept, in declaring her a “helper comparable to him” and in declaring that in marriage they would “become one flesh”, God was carefully shaping human creation to provide the perfect picture of Christ and the church, even though that would only be revealed many centuries later. With this in mind, I have no great difficulty in swapping between seeing the Song of Solomon as a picture of Christ and the church, and a description of ideal human love between man and wife, since they are both so clearly connected in scripture.

Love is the foundation

To go back to my very first point, this book is love poetry of a high order. The topic is obviously love, which is reflected in the titles of all this series of talks. God is love, as the first epistle of John tells us, and therefore, since mankind is made in God's image, love is the foundational emotion. Love is the foundation of our relationship with God, and the foundation of marriage and, at some level, all human relationships. Love is not a static, lifeless thing, it therefore needs to be maintained and nurtured, and communion is a key part of that process. One definition of communion, provided by Google and Oxford Languages, is,

“The sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level.”

It is hard to imagine how love could exist without the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings; it certainly would struggle to stay healthy and grow. And so, as we step through today's passage in Song of Solomon, from chapter 3 verse 6 to chapter 5 verse 1, let's see how the communion of love works and what it looks like. I will pick out two points to highlight in each of the four sections into which I have divided the passage.

Our first section will be from chapter 3, verses 6 to 11, and in it, the bride is speaking about her beloved bridegroom in what may be a continuation of the dream described in the first part of the chapter.

“Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders? Behold, it is Solomon's couch, with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night. Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin: he made its pillars of silver, it supports of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart” (Song of Solomon 3: vv.6-11).

The bride pictures Solomon seated on a palanquin, or sedan chair, that is a covered box, carried by bearers using two poles. In this case the box is very grand, as befits a great king, and made of very expensive materials. It is defended by a well-armed and alert bodyguard of sixty men. The bride exhorts the other young women to go out and see the wonderful sight of the king, crowned and full of joy, ready for his wedding day.

Since our topic is communion, all my points will have the theme of sharing, or mutuality. The first is...

Mutual respect

Although the characters in this book speak by turn, the shared delight and respect is obvious. In this section we see the high opinion that the Shulamite bride has of her husband. His entrance and presence are dramatic but sweetly attractive. His transport is made from the best of materials, and he is well loved by others beside the bride; his palanquin being “paved with love.” If we are thinking of a wife/husband relationship then the respect, reciprocated by the husband in later sections, is beautiful and proper. Each wants the other to know how much they are valued and speaks highly to other people of the qualities of their spouse. If we think of Christ and His church, then we respect His Lordship when we listen to and obey His commands, and delight to tell others how wonderful He is. Christ loves His church and valued her enough to give His life to make her

His own. It is hard to have loving communion where there is no mutual respect between the parties.

Complementary, not identical

It is patently obvious that the description of the bridegroom in this section would not remotely fit the bride! Nor would the description of the bride that we will come to shortly, be at all appropriate for the bridegroom! The two are quite different people, but they are very much complementary, that is they combine in ways that enhance and emphasise each other. This fits well with what we have already quoted from Genesis chapter two, of Eve as a “helper comparable to [Adam].” Eve complemented Adam and was essential for his happiness and fulfilment. This is true of all healthy marriages; neither spouse has all the gifts or abilities that every situation may require, but together they are much more than the sum of the parts, as each one completes and enhances the other. We might have naturally shied away from using this kind of language about Christ and the church. We can see how we very much need Christ to meet our inadequacies, but we would not want to say that He needs anything else to be complete. And yet scripture presents the Lord as waiting to present His bride to Himself, and the wedding supper of the Lamb, mentioned in Revelation 19 is clearly a great and glorious day. We should certainly grow to be more like Christ, so as to complement Him better, and to enjoy our communion with Him more and more, but we will never be His equal, either individually or collectively.

Let’s move on to our next section which consists of the first eight verses of chapter four.

“Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armoury, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense. You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards” (Song of Solomon 4: vv.1-8).

Shared time and time to adore

Communion is one of those things that takes time to do properly. It must be shared time, time together. Time is one of the commodities in shortest supply today! There are so many things that press on our calendars. There are work, family and church responsibilities. There is always something waiting to be done, and we need to set aside some time for rest and leisure so that we can keep functioning properly. Then there are always our phones and the internet waiting to swallow endless hours if we are not careful! Time really is precious and should be consciously managed, but we need to invest some of it in the communion of love.

The words in this section are spoken by the bridegroom. He has evidently spent time in the presence of his bride contemplating her appearance, and probably time by himself just thinking about her! Time does not have quite the same meaning, or limitations, for the Eternal God, but we are certainly always in the Lord’s thoughts and prayers, and can be assured of His constant love. How much time do you and I dedicate to simply sitting in the Saviour’s presence and pondering on how wonderful He is? When we are busy doing other things, as we often have to be, do our thoughts keep drifting back to Him, like the thoughts of a newlywed do to their spouse?

Shared outlook

The bridegroom requests that his bride come with him from Lebanon where the mountain range is that contains the places named. The language is symbolic, the mountains of Lebanon would be fresh and clean, possibly snow-covered. They would also give a grand view south towards the land of Israel. The bridegroom wishes to share this vantage point and outlook with his bride. Marriages work well when there is a shared outlook. I'm not contradicting my earlier point about complementarity; the couple may see slightly different things from their shared outlook and have varying ideas on the way forward. The point is, that they stand together and look in the same direction. The outlook of a Christian needs to be constantly checked, and brought into alignment with the outlook of Christ Jesus, as it is revealed to us in the Bible. Part of that process obviously comes from regular Bible reading, but it also needs the regular communion of love with the Lord Himself. One of my favourite passages from the Psalms is Psalm 32: vv.8-10 which reads,

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.”

I love the thought of being guided by God's eye. The expression suggests that God is looking at something, and we then look at His face, see where He is looking, and understand what He wants us to do. How much better than the sort of guidance where God pulls us one way or another like a horse is directed by the metal bit in its mouth! If we are to learn to look in the same direction as God, and to understand what His glances mean, we will need to be more expert in the communion of love.

If our personal communion with Christ is making our outlook more and more like His, and we are reading the Bible and praying together with our spouse, then we will increasingly have a shared, and spiritually healthy, outlook.

Let's press on to our third section.

“You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices – a fountain of gardens, a well of living water, and streams from Lebanon” (Song of Solomon 4:vv.9-15).

Shared values

What is the most important thing in the world to you? Family? Career? Faith? I'm not asking you to make a choice, just pointing out the importance of deciding what you truly value. You could say that the most important thing in the life of the bridegroom was the bride; and for her, it was him. Or you might say that their mutual love was a shared value. They both ransack the riches of language, and use many and varied verbal pictures, to find ways of expressing their delight in each other. It is hard to have a healthy relationship with somebody that lives by a different set of values to us. How can we agree if one of us values money above everything else and the other wants nothing but leisure and quietness? Have you ever thought through what God values? The first things that come to mind might be holiness and purity. Perhaps you would add justice and

honesty. You really should include love, meekness, faithfulness and gentleness; and I could easily add many more things to the list. The big question is how much this list overlaps with the things that I value most highly? If we want a healthy and growing relationship with our God and Saviour, then we need to start amending our own list to match His. Real communion demands shared values.

Exclusive sharing

At face value, the phrase 'exclusive sharing' sounds self-contradictory; however, it is a very important concept, both in marriage and in our relationship with God. The bridegroom describes his bride as "a garden enclosed", "a spring shut up" and a "fountain sealed." This seems to be a way of saying that there were some things about his bride that were exclusively for him. They were lovely and delightful to share just between the two of them, but they were not for any outsider. So it is between a married couple, both in sexual things and in some other aspects of their personal lives; there are things that are not for sharing with anybody else. The marriage relationship is meant to be an exclusive one and it is soon spoiled when it is not. The same truth holds between the Lord and His church, and between the Lord and an individual believer – the relationship should be exclusive.

There are several places in the Old Testament where the Jews are told "The Lord your God is a jealous God." This didn't mean that God was suspicious or resentful. It meant that He demanded that His people Israel should worship and should serve Him alone, and that they were to have no other gods alongside Him. The same is true of us today. Of course, the couple in this book, like every other couple, would have other family, and friends who were very dear to them; that is healthy and proper. But friendship and affection beyond a certain level would have been improper, and would have severely damaged the communion of love between these two characters. So it is that we may have many interests and activities in our lives, but any that get raised to a level that starts to interfere with our special fellowship with the Lord, are becoming idols, or false gods, and need to be dealt with firmly.

We have one final, short section of verses for today,

"Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits. I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Song of Solomon 4: v.16 to 5: v.1).

Shared intimacy

These verses clearly follow on from the remarks of the bridegroom about his spouse being "a garden enclosed." She speaks first, and invites him to enjoy the scents of the garden and to enter the garden itself for his enjoyment. The bridegroom then responds that he has done so, and speaks of his pleasure in it. The image is clearly one of the physical intimacy enjoyed between husband and wife. The Bible isn't exactly shy of the fact that sexual relations, always intended to be within a marriage relationship, are something for men and women to take pleasure in. It is intended to be the ultimate intimacy, or communion, between two human beings - a physical expression of the love that makes two people want to spend their lives together. There are many kinds of intimacy, and they are all part of the joy of being together with the person that you love. Intimacy tends to make us vulnerable to the other person, since they could easily hurt us using the information, or weakness, we have revealed. We probably all have painful memories of something that has been used to taunt or embarrass us by someone we thought we could trust. How good it is to know that the Lord will never use what we share with Him to cause us any harm. Even though He knows everything about us, including our every thought and inclination, it is still necessary for

us to tell Him things openly and honestly. Even things that may embarrass us deeply to have to confess. We really can't be too open and trusting with our Saviour, or our Father in heaven.

One of the most remarkable books in the Bible is Hosea. The book of Hosea tells the story of the prophet's unfaithful wife, her shocking behaviour, and the anguish it causes Hosea. Then, most astonishingly, it applies the picture to God Himself, and recounts the pain and longing that God's unfaithful people cause Him! How staggering that God makes Himself vulnerable, and I use the word very cautiously, to the rejection of those that He sets His love on. Therefore, how careful we should be, that we do not hurt the Lord who opens His heart to us in communion.

Feeling 'at home' together

My final point is a more general one that arises from the whole section, or even the whole book. You can't read this story without thinking how beautifully at home together these two people appear to be. They obviously delight in each other's company when together, and long for each other when apart. They love to talk to each other, and they always speak frankly and openly, although gently and lovingly at the same time. If ever there was a story that demanded the ending, "and they lived happily ever after", this is it! The best couples always seem to be comfortably at home with one another even when they are facing difficulties, or are many miles from their literal home. It is part of knowing each other well, loving each other deeply and trusting each other implicitly. Is that the kind of relationship you enjoy with the Lord Jesus? It is certainly the kind that He wishes to have with you.

We all look forward to getting to heaven and seeing the Lord face to face. We look forward to sharing His home and enjoying His company forever. We want to be able to simply bask in His love and enjoy Him for who He is. The question is why are we waiting for heaven to get started with these things? Christ longs for us to begin enjoying this kind of communion of love here and now.

In Conclusion

Love is perhaps the greatest of God's gifts to us. The love of the Father and the Son for believers in the Lord Jesus is at the pinnacle of love. The love that God allows us to share with other human beings, flows out of His love, and is a beautiful derivative from it. Love virtually demands happy communion, both for its proper enjoyment and for its healthy continuance. May we take every opportunity to enjoy the communion of love.

Lord Jesus, we really are thankful for Your amazing love for us. We would have thought that we were so far beneath You that You could never care for us, or really make Yourself known to us. We realise that our sinfulness and our human limitations will always prevent us from totally enjoying all that Your love wants to communicate to us while we are in this world. Nevertheless, we suspect that we could all enjoy vastly more than we currently do of the communion of Your love, even within those limits. Please open our hearts to love and enjoy you more and more, Amen.

Thank you for listening to this truth for today talk on Song of Solomon – The Communion of Love, talk number T1260.

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