

A Love Song

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[0 : 00] Shall I lift things to the Lord in prayer? As the Queen's in the city centre this lunchtime, I think she's just recently gone to Clyde Bank.

We'll begin by praying for her, especially for her Christian profession and witness. Father, we pray that you would uphold our Queen, especially, Father, in these latter days of her reign.

And we pray that you would enable her to use her status and her many opportunities to speak about you. Father, in many ways, the people of our lands, they seek stability.

We all yearn for stability. We live in such a confused world, a world in which morals are being redefined.

Relationships are disintegrating all around us. And there's financial chaos and social disorder. And also, ultimately, death visits us.

[1 : 20] And even before that, it snatches so many of our loved ones away. And so, in our lands, people yearn for stability, for a rock to anchor their lives to.

And in many ways, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh have offered stability and continuity when things all around seem to be falling apart.

We pray, Father, that you would use the Queen to point to you. For in you only is there an anchor for our souls.

A relationship that death cannot steal away. A future that isn't simply a desire, but the reality itself. And so, Father, we lift the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to you this day as they visit Glasgow.

And we pray that you would use them for your glory.

[2 : 28] We think now about ourselves and we ask, Father, that you would forgive our sin as we forgive those who sin against us.

We pray that you would not lead us into temptation. That you would structure our lives so that we can avoid circumstances in which we're most susceptible to sin.

Father, we are all weak. So please protect us. Having sought forgiveness and repentance, we hear words of comfort from the Apostle John, who says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Father, we now seek your guidance in our lives. Many of us are faced with difficult decisions in these days. Things that in the past we've perhaps been able to put off, but they're now pressing down upon us and it feels acute and perhaps they're difficult days.

And we need your help, Father. Father, so through your spirit we ask for wisdom, that you would help us to see situations with a biblical and eternal perspective, that we would, Father, find wise counsel.

[4 : 14] Perhaps there's a brother or sister in the church that we could talk to who could give the wisdom of their experience in these situations.

And Father, your son directed us to ask that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So we lift these situations to you, seeking your guidance.

Many of us will shortly be returning to work and we especially pray, Father, for this ministry in the workplace. We ask that you would enable our brothers and sisters to radiate your son.

We pray, Father, that you'd encourage them in what is often a difficult and hostile environment. We ask, Father, that those working here in the city centre would radiate you.

That folk would be drawn through their witness to your son, Jesus Christ. Where they too can have this great hope.

[5 : 30] And finally, Father, we ask that you would be with us now as we come to your word. And we lift all our prayers to you, confident, as we ask in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Well, you might like to pick your Bibles up. And we're looking at the Song of Songs.

It's on page 562, the reading. 562. So the Song of Songs, chapter 5, and I'll read from verse 2. I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound. My beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.

For my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I put off my garment. How could I put it on? I bathe my feet.

[6 : 53] How could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not. I called him, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me, as they went about the city. They beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem. If you find my beloved, do you tell him, I am sick with love? What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women?

What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us? My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.

[8 : 03] His head is the finest gold. His locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool.

His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies dripping liquid myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with jewels.

His body is polished ivory bedecked with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.

His mouth is most sweet and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Well, the Song of Songs, like the Bible, is a love story. And we like love stories, don't we?

[9 : 11] Do you like love stories? We have plenty of love stories, I think, here at St. George's Tron. Barry Webb says this, listen to this. He says, the overwhelming impression that the Song of Songs leaves with us is that love is a beautiful thing, almost too beautiful for words to express.

And before, friends, we look in detail at this chapter 5 passage, I thought that we'd sort of think about the genre of the Song of Songs.

We'll think about the way it's written and put together, the Song of Songs. Well, it's a certain type of writing, isn't it, in the Bible? It's not psalms, though it is poetic.

It's not proverbs, though there is wisdom in it. Just look with me at chapter 2 and verse 7. Can you see? I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

And sort of three times that's repeated in the Song of Songs. It's almost like a refrain. And she's asking for restraint, isn't she?

[10 : 30] She's sort of saying, you readers or you girls to be specific. It's interesting that, isn't it? I thought these inclinations were mostly for men, but she seems to be speaking to the girls.

She's saying, you who are going out with somebody, don't let your passion overwhelm you both.

You know, wait until you're married, don't jump the gun. That's what she's saying.

She could have written a book like this, which I've just picked up from the bookstall. Pure Sex. She could have written that, I think. If only the 21st century world would listen to that wisdom.

It's a relational chaos, isn't it, out there? And so there's wisdom. But what else about this genre?

Well, it's a song, isn't it? The Song of Songs. It's sort of the ultimate song. Like the King of Kings is the ultimate king.

[11 : 31] And it has this peculiar language of love, doesn't it, as we read it. Shakespeare wrote, Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? I'm a complete failure when it comes to that sort of language of love.

I call my wife Duck. And she's not very impressed by it. She doesn't think it's very flattering. So I'm not too good at those sorts of things.

And the Song of Songs, it's sort of laden with romantic metaphor, isn't it, as we read it. And we use metaphors, don't we, in everyday life. We might say something like, Those tickets to the Olympics, they're like gold dust.

You'll never get hold of one. So we use metaphor, don't we, all the time. And as we read through, we'll see it's also full of imagery in the Song of Songs.

Like in the Psalms, Psalm 42, As a deer pants for water, so my soul longs after you. You know, and sometimes in life, purely descriptive words, they're not enough, are they?

[12:40] Have you ever reached a point in your life when words just don't seem enough? You know, we need sort of the visual department of our brains to join the party. Don't know what side that would be.

The Apostle John, when he wrote Revelation, that was what was happening with him. He'd exhausted his usual vocabulary, and it's like he steps up a gear. So John says his face was like the sun, shining at full strength.

Revelation, chapter 1. And just listen to this again. Just listen. Chapter 5 from verse 10. Can you see? My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.

His head is the finest gold. His locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool.

His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies dripping with myrrh. And I wonder, husbands and wives, if you're still sort of communicating in language of sort of affirmation and love with each other.

[13:53] You know, do you say similar sorts of things? Are you communicating your love to each other? I wonder when the last time was that you said, I love you, to your wife or your husband.

You know, when did you last compliment each other? Here's some words for you to remember for when you get home. I won't get you to recite them.

You can say to your husband or your wife, you're beautiful and I love you. That would be nice, wouldn't it, to say that. And if you're not married and you're not going out with anybody, don't think that you've been short-changed.

If you're a Christian, you're caught up in the ultimate romance, aren't you? With a king of kings. This life, all the romances in this life, they're ultimately snatched away, aren't they?

In death. But if you're a Christian, you've got a relationship with a creator of the universe that can never be threatened or taken away. You know, you've got Jesus for all of eternity, haven't you?

[15:02] And he loves you. I've not been married long. I've sort of reconciled myself to a ministry for the rest of my life as a single person.

And that was great. So those of you who are married, just express that to each other, to your husband or to your wife.

Here's some more interesting aspects about the Song of Songs. There's no mention of God. Now, that's a surprise, isn't it? You open the Bible, you expect everywhere to mention God.

And the sections in the Song of Songs, they're the dreams, they're dreams. And overall, it's not easy to interpret. But what is clear is that the song is about a romance.

And I think that that's the reason that it's inspired and it's found its way into the canon of Scripture before us.

[16:05] You know, there's a depth to love, isn't there? And you can just sort of feel it as you read the words. And God the Father has loved God the Son for all of eternity.

And he's made us, you and me, in his image. Genesis chapter 1, verse 26. That is right at the core of our beings, there is love.

And as we read the Song of Songs, we're thinking romantically. God's pulling the romantic strings of our souls. All Scripture, says Paul, in brackets, including the Song of Songs, is God-breathed.

And so there's this romance, isn't there? And we can't help, friends, to think about the ultimate romance. Yes, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

They love each other. But more than that, such love enters the world. Doesn't he? Jesus, to visit us.

[17:21] Yes, Jesus, he's infinitely more courageous and loving than all the knights in shining armour that this world could offer.

Isn't he? And he visits. God visits us to woo his bride, his church, to himself.

And Jesus dies for his church. John says, this is love. And Paul says, he says in Ephesians chapter 5, that when we look at marriage, when we look at a married couple together, they're a visual aid to Christ and the church.

It's quite a responsibility, isn't it, that, if you're married? So, well, that was by way of introduction.

And I wanted us to see that the Song of Songs, well, there's what Don Carson calls, listen to this, a

typological connection with God and Israel and with Christ and the church.

Barry Webb says this. He says, the Bible, like the Song of Songs, ends with a bride calling for the one she loves to come.

[18:38] Revelation chapter 22. The spirit and the bride say come. Now, we obviously can't cover the Song of Songs in any depth, can we, in a short lunchtime service.

So I'm just going to concentrate on a couple of passages. And I'm hoping that it's going to whet our appetite to read it more when we get home. I'm hoping it's like, you know, you walk past a nice restaurant and you can smell the aroma of food being grilled and it can sort of entice you in, can't it? I'm hoping that that sort of thing will be happening and you'll want to read more. My talk's called The Approach of Love. Just look with me at chapter 2, verses 8 to 10.

The Approach of Love. The voice of my beloved. Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands, behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me, arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

[19:56] So he's arrived, hasn't he? And he's asking her to come out. Verse 10. Can you see? Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

The end of verse 13. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. Verse 14. Let me see your face. But the girl, well, she's too slow off the mark.

And she misses her opportunity. And in the dream that follows, in the dream that follows, she's tossing and turning in bed. And she's thinking about her beloved.

Will she find him again? Chapter 3, verse 1. On my bed at night I sought him, whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. I will rise now and go about the city and the streets and in the squares.

I will seek him, whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. Have you seen him, whom my soul loves?

[21:03] Scarcely had I passed them. When I found him, whom my soul loves. I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her who conceived me.

And then, again, friends, in chapter 5, she's dreaming. Or is it a nightmare this time? You know, she's separated from a lover again.

It's the second time. And she's just been too slow out of the blocks. Chapter 2, verse 2. I slept, but my heart was awake.

A sound. My beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love. My dove, my perfect one. For my heart is wet with, my head is wet with dew.

My locks with the drops of the night. I put off my garment. How could I put it on? She's hesitating, isn't she?

[22:10] I'd bathe my feet. How could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch. And my heart was thrilled within me. I arose.

At last, some action. She's getting up. I arose to open to my beloved. And my hands were dripping with myrrh. My fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my beloved. But, disappointment. My beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke.

I sought him, but found him not. I called him, but he gave no answer. And so she calls into the night, doesn't she?

She's calling for him. Where are you? Where are you, my beloved? Romeo, Romeo, where art thou? Romeo. Romeo. Now, friends, the distinguishing thing here is that there was an approach.

[23:14] A lover came to meet her, but there was no contact, was there? And in verse 3, she contemplates going to the door, doesn't she?

She thinks about it. And then she's just thinking, well, I can hardly be bothered. And haven't we all missed opportunities by dilly-dallying? Have you ever done that yourself?

Have you ever missed something because you've sort of hesitated? There's been some reason you couldn't respond quickly. It's like a young man, isn't it? He's captivated by a young lady. And he goes along to this Cayley, and there she is.

She's sat there, and it's as if she's just sat waiting for him to ask her for a dance. But he just doesn't get around to it. He sort of gets his mobile phone out of his sparring and sends a text. He talks to somebody about the football results. He thinks, well, I'll go later on. And then suddenly, it's like the Cayley band strikes up.

[24 : 19] Gay Gordon's or something. He looks over, and there she is, being invited for a dance with somebody else. And he's been too late.

And in this chapter 5 dream, this lover, he gets tantalizingly close. But she sort of hangs back. And there's two reasons for not getting up in verse 3.

Number one, I can't be bothered to put my clothes on again. And number two, well, I'll get my feet dirty. And we all shout, don't dilly-dally. Come on, get up, go.

Don't be sidetracked. You know, she should have dropped everything, shouldn't she? To go and see her, love her. But, Psalm 95, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.

And perhaps someone listening, you felt the approach of Jesus. You know, he's arranged all the circumstances in your life of late. You can just think it through.

[25 : 24] People who you've met. Ways in which he's found that you can hear his word. And he's brought you along to church this lunchtime. Then don't keep him at arm's length anymore.

And so this lover, well, he's now twice come to the door. And Romeo looks up at Juliet's window. Verse 10. My beloved speaks and says to me, Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

And doesn't God call us to himself at just the right moment? Or is it that today? Many Christians here this afternoon, you know, we needed to hear God calling us back to himself.

You know, because we sort of distanced ourselves in some way. Maybe the comforts of this life have been overwhelming us and attracting us of late. We've been drawn away.

We've been too busy. John Piper says this. Listen to this. In his book, Don't Waste Your Life. He says, What is the one passion of your life that makes everything else look like rubbish in comparison?

[26 : 44] Oh, that God would help me waken in you a single passion for a single great reality that would unleash you and set you free from small dreams and send you for the glory of Christ into all the spheres of secular life and to all the peoples of the earth.

So she hesitates, doesn't she? She weighs up the pros and cons. I've just washed my feet. I don't want to get them dirty again. Chapter 5, verse 3. I've just bought a field.

I must go and see it. Luke chapter 14 says Jesus in a parable. And eternity with Jesus can slip through our fingers.

Friends. But here, the good news is the lover, he just keeps on coming back. Chapter 2, verse 8. He's on his way, leaping over the mountains.

Chapter 3, verse 6. He's back again. Chapter 5, verse 2. He's back again. Think about it. His love, it's not like it's once spurned and then sort of forgotten.

[27 : 53] It's not like that, is it? And until the moment Jesus returns as judge, you can repent. You can turn back to God.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him and he with me.

And doesn't your heart just leap when someone you love, they come to see you? Has that happened to you? You know, maybe they travel some distance to visit you. They go out of the way and then you hear their voice talking to you.

I was once in a hospital in Northampton, semi-conscious. And I heard my mum talking to me. And it was lovely.

And this lover, he goes out of his way, doesn't he? He's besotted with her. Chapter 2, verse 10. Arise, come away. Verse 13. Arise, come away.

[29 : 00] Verse 14. Let me see your face. And Jesus calls us, doesn't he? Come, follow me, he says. And it's romance.

Par excellence. Isn't it? Think about it. It's like a Billy Graham crusade in 1984 at Bristol. Billy Graham had been criticised for the music that was played.

People thought that folk were responding because of emotions. And so he says, on this occasion, I don't want any music. And he called people to respond. And apparently you could hear the seats flicking up.

That's the only thing you could hear. Seats flicking up everywhere. And it was like the whole stadium was applauding as seats were flicking up. And people were going to the front to respond. And the prodigal son, he arises from the pig trough, doesn't he? And sets out to home. And this girl, she gets out of bed, doesn't she? She chases after her lover.

[30 : 04] And the Lord is calling. He's calling people to himself today in 2012. Or perhaps he's calling someone here back to himself. Like the church in Ephesus.

So here it is, friends. A story of love. And it found its way, didn't it? Into our Bibles. Which is the story of love.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you love us so much that you sent your dear son into this world to die for us.

We thank you for that incomparable love. And we pray, Father, that we would respond by turning our lives to you.

Living for you. And not living for the things of this world. So we thank you, Father, for inspiring your word.

[31 : 15] We thank you for this wee book in our Bibles. And we pray that you'd go with us now and use us for your glory. And to these ends, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.