



Series: The Song of Solomon

Sermon: God's Book on Love

Passage: Song of Solomon 1:1-2 et. al.

Speaker: Spence Shelton

Intro

Today we begin a series of sermons through the Old Testament book The Song of Solomon. This will be a two-month in-depth look at dating, romance, marriage, and yes we will talk about sex. This is a big topic we are stepping into! A topic that is personal to everyone. And because romantic love is so highly charged, today I want to start with an orientation to this book of scripture. I want to share with you for a few minutes WHY I believe our church needs THIS book RIGHT NOW. We'll call that part of the sermon your pastor's heart for preaching Song of Solomon. The second half of the sermon I want to give you an orientation to this book so that once you get over the SHOCK of what you are reading, you will be equipped to grow in your faith through this book.

Now let me pause here and say something as a way of transition into the sermon. This scripture would probably get a PG-13 rating in today's world. And some of you are sitting beside your children and you are in a cold sweat... your apple watch is buzzing you telling you it's time to breathe. Ok so that's why this pause is here. We sent an email out this week

and posted online about it but there is a chance you are surprised. Here is what you do...FIRST – know that I have a 6th & 7th grader who is in here listening to this. And maybe you need to let it ride. Because you can take them out of this room, but you can't take them out of the world. And the world is going to disciple your kids. So, if they are middle school aged I would say it's time to talk about God's wonderful design for marriage and sex. And these sermons can tee up those conversations. However, if you are not comfortable, I get it. You think you are uncomfortable? Imagine how I feel...my parents watch these sermons online! So, here's what I'm going to do – I'm going to pray and ask God's blessing over our study of his word. And as I do that, you can slip out of the room and into the lobby. And there in the lobby our kid's ministry and our student ministry will be waiting to help direct you. You should then get back in here cause you need this.

PRAY!!

Ok let's get into this. As you will see the rest of this series...every weekend here we walk through a passage of scripture. In fact, we are going to go through chapter 1 twice. But today will be different because we are doing an overview of the whole book so that you can understand what you are reading. But I want to start with WHY. Why preach Song of Solomon? Like I said this first part I really don't know what



else to call it other than your pastor's heart behind preaching Song of Solomon.

1. God's word offers clarity & hope to a confused world

Now more than ever there are so many loud & conflicting voices out there speaking their truth about love, and specifically about sex. The questions around sexuality & gender identity are unlike anything the modern world has ever dealt with before. When your 6th grader is asked how they identify or what their preference is...you are in a new era. And I want you to be informed and confident about what God really has to say about marriage and sexuality.

I know the bible has a reputation in our world as being outdated and irrelevant when it comes to sex. Why do we need an old book telling us what to do? That's completely at odds with a "do what feels right for you" culture. The current world around us doesn't see sex as bound together with love anymore. It CAN be, but love isn't necessary. And certainly, marriage isn't. I look at a sexually charged world and see so much brokenness and confusion. And I believe God offers hope to it. I believe he offers a clear vision of romance and sex that is far more fulfilling than the hollow attempts this world makes. God designed you as a whole person with the imprint of eternity on your heart and when you choose his way you find true fulfillment. What you are going to see is that His word to us on sexuality and romance is actually a direct line to

understanding his eternal unchanging love for us. It's going to blow your mind to discover how God designed romance & sex to be a shadow of his love for you. And THAT is just as relevant today as the day it was written.

We should not be surprised there is a whole book in the bible on Romantic love! God designed us to love love. That's why the greatest songs and greatest movies and all other forms of art are about love! Nothing thrills us like discovering love and nothing disappoints us like missing out on it or losing love we had. And I'm telling you that's OK. That's why God gave us a book about it. To guide us through it and show us his purpose for it.

And as we do, we will ultimately be drawn to something GREATER and more Lasting & Fulfilling than romance & sex, I believe some of you will be set free. The true love and beauty of God is going to set you free, and your friends free, from the chains of sexual bondage they've been bound by. AND it means you don't need a certain marital status to be *really* impacted by this book. I'll get more into that in a minute.

2. God's word offers clarity & hope to a confused church

Christians are all over the map when it comes to understanding and following God's way for them in this area of life. Some have allowed pop culture to decide their sexual ethic for them. A study released last year by the pew research



forum found that 57% of Christians believe sex between non married adults is acceptable by their faith.¹ I recognize that's many of you. And I think it's because you were disciplined by pop culture more than by God's word. And I hope over these next two months you will submit yourself to the word you claim to believe is God's word and even if it means hard decisions, you will choose him because he's better.

But then there are many Christians who have had a different experience. They encountered a teaching from the church or from Christian parents that treats sex as taboo. They've encountered a purity culture that says sex is bad and you should spend your single life wrapped in a loose-fitting blanket socially distanced from the opposite sex. And the idea of talking about sex in church?

Listen some of ya'll are sitting here and you are like "That preacher has said sex 100 times and we've been in here all of 5 minutes. Where. Am. I?" Well, first I assure you that you are in a church that preaches the bible. But you might be shocked when you discover THIS IS IN your bible. I'll never forget sophomore year I was in a guy's bible study at UNC and they said hey let's go through the Song of Solomon. We used this video teaching by Tommy Nelson and ya'll we were dumbfounded. He taught passages like Chapter 7.7-8

¹ ["Half of U.S. Christians say casual sex between consenting adults is sometimes or always acceptable"](#)

"Your stature is like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.

⁸ I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit."

And we thought....WHAAAAAT? This is in the bible? I think we started our scripture memory program that week. I had no idea the bible was...sensual. That it talked so positively and so sensually about romantic love. I grew up in church. And we were really good at being told "don't think or look at or touch a girl until you marry her." And while there was some underlying wisdom in that which we will talk about in this series...I was not offered the very positive glorious view of marital love, including sex, that God offers his people. And many Christians go into marriage feeling like they've got permission now to do something *wrong* instead of feeling gratitude for a beautiful and powerful gift God joyfully gives to them. And a lot of Christian marriages struggle with this area because of that baggage.

So, one of our big goals in this series is to redeem The current Christian view of romance, marriage & sex. On that listen I need to specifically address singles. if you think this series is all about marriage...so you are going to tune out...YOU WILL MISS THE WHOLE POINT. What you are going to hear time and again is that do not need marriage to access God's redeeming



love for you. Marriage is the symbol; God's love is the reality of the symbol. The Apostle Paul says singleness is a GIFT to be exalted. Marital status doesn't hold you back from knowing God fully. That's crazy. Singleness is a gift, not a curse. I know church can sometimes make it feel like the goal of your Christian faith is marriage and children. And where that has been the case here, I am sorry. But that's not the gospel we preach nor is that scripture's message. The Goal of your faith is BRINGING GLORY TO GOD as you walk joyfully in his presence and live according to his word. And I want you to look to that!

And I am pleading with God that this leads to breakthroughs for you. Leads right to my 3rd reason to preach this series

3. God's word offers his redeeming love to all people

Listen the second I talk about sex and romance I recognize some defenses start to go up in some of you. There is NO question that some of you have real hurt in your past as it relates to this area. It's actually the thing that brings me the most real trepidation in preaching this book. That I will say something or even in tone somehow communicate something that sends you down the wrong path and causes you to miss God's redeeming love for you. I do believe that areas in our life with the deepest pain are where God can do the greatest healing if we will allow him. And what I'm going to say here,

and then again in a minute when we talk about interpreting the book, is that a big message of the book is that marital love is a SYMBOL of God's love. God's love for you is the reality the symbol represents. And that love is available to you in your pain.

If you are hurting because of your own sin and the destruction you've caused.... OR if you are hurting because someone else sinned against you. Statistics tell me both are in here. First – If you are in Christ, I want you to hear in this series that you are not your pain. We will not label you by your sin or by your suffering like the devil will. That's how it retains power over you. We will not MINIMIZE IT. No, we will just not label you by that here. In Christ your label is SON or DAUGHTER of GOD. And there is POWER in Christ to bring healing to you, to bring freedom to you. I believe it in my bones, and I have seen him do it.

Second - My commitment to you is that we will walk with you through that healing. Whether it's one of our pastoral team members, or folks in your community group.

In fact, we have a conference we are holding in the middle of this series called "Redeeming Sex." Where we are going to talk about some things that we can't cover at length in this series. This is our attempt to show the beauty of God's design as it speaks into everything from same sex attraction to talking



with kids about sex to purity culture. We've got a whole morning with Dr. Jennifer Degler that will specifically be for women. And we've got a time of prayer set aside for healing. It's going to be a great weekend.

That's my heart behind this series. As we follow the storyline of the couple we will see in here, we will talk about manhood & womanhood, dating & marriage, sex, conflict, and much more. In all of that here is our thesis. Something I'm going to come back to week in and week out that I hope will be what you walk away from this series with:

God is love, God made love, & God gives love. So, pursue his way of love in your life.

Ok now let me switch gears a little and offer you 3 keys to interpreting this book.² And we will do so looking at verse 1 of chapter 1.

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. -- 1:1

Right off the bat you see the first key.

1. The Song of Solomon is a love song.

Look at verse two:

² These "keys" are from the introduction of Douglas Sean O'Donnell's wonderful commentary *Song of Solomon: An invitation to intimacy* in the *preaching the word* series. (Wheaton, IL. Crossway 2012) 15ff. He offers

**2 Oh, that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your caresses are more delightful than wine. -- Song of Songs 1:2 (CSB)**

Praise God! How many times have I stood here and told ya'll the bible is awesome? And finally, ya'll see it. Kissing and wine by verse 2. I made sure the medical response team checked the defibrillator to make sure it was working for some of you.

First it is Solomon's song. So let me tell you about the author. Solomon was the son of King David and is known as the wisest man who ever lived. And he had 700 wives. So maybe not the wisest after all. Now, instantly you may think that having 700 wives disqualifies him. Well in part you'd be right. In fact, what multiple scholars believe as do I, is that Solomon wrote this song later in his life looking back...maybe even all the way back to his first wife...but looking back and writing about what love SHOULD be like. You are going to see a woman and a man and in this I think Solomon is just like any other song writer where he's not the character in the story, but his personal story clearly shapes the whole thing. So maybe a quick way to say it is that as you are reading this, Solomon is Shakespeare, not Romeo.³ And this is his greatest song. The SONG OF SONGS...He got his poetic gift from his daddy David. And

them as Four Pillars of understanding the book. I consolidated two of them and I am very indebted to him for the structure.

³ O'Donnell, _____



Solomon wrote over 1000 songs and said THIS ONE. THIS ONE IS MY BEST. The one inspired by God himself. So, pay attention.

And the style - its poetry. See if you are new to the bible, you may be new to this but the among the 66 books of the bible are a few different genres. There's narrative prose like genesis or exodus where its recounting events. There is prophecy where a person is speaking a warning about future consequences. There are more instructional books like Romans or Ephesians that explain how to live. And then there is the wisdom literature. That's what this is. Specifically poetic wisdom. It's teaching through song.

And just like if you were to hear a song today you would expect metaphors and imagery that give the main idea an added punch. For example, When Jon Legend sings

"Give your all to me I give my all to you. You're my end and my beginning, even when I lose I'm winning."

That imagery of totality and of loss & win is so much more powerful and less creepy than "I think about you all the time and my well-being and even my very identity is significantly determined by how reciprocate my love." That just doesn't land as well.

So, when you read

9 I compare you, my darling, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. -- 1:9

He's not saying...girl you look like a horse. But like a royal horse you know. Or when he calls her teeth a flock of goats or any of that...its poetry. Like poetry it follows a general timeline but not exact. It flashes to future and past as it goes. And I'll help you see that. And here's why I love this: God chose a poetic song to teach us about romantic love. He didn't give an instruction manual. He gave a poetic story. I think to show us that human love cannot be fully captured in words. And I think he did THAT to say if these images evoke these powerful feelings about human love...and human love is a shadow of divine love...HOW POWERFUL, HOW PASSIONATE...TO use the old hymn...HOW DEEP THE FATHER'S LOVE FOR US! HOW VAST BEYOND ALL MEASURE.

3. The Song of Solomon is a love song **meant to give us wisdom.**

Ok this song, or album, is a part of the wisdom books along with proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It's in here to instruct. And the instruction tends to focus on two different groups. The single person and the married person. The primary instruction comes from a newlywed woman to her single girlfriends. She's going to tell these young virgins who are of marriageable age that they are to wait. Wait with anticipation yes but wait. Do



not awaken love until its time. She comes out of love scene after love scene and says you should wait for sexual intimacy until marriage. And that's big. It's not some old celibate prophet who tells them this. It's a newlywed woman. A sister & a peer. Cool your passions now and arouse them later when its time. In fact, the daughters of Jerusalem are kind of a key to understanding the purpose of this book. Think about it - proverbs is written from the angle of a father to a son...this one is written from the angle of a newlywed woman talking to her younger sisters. These two books are companions to one another and then Ecclesiastes is for everyone in every season. Ya'll the bible is awesome. But my point is single people you are not an afterthought but instead a main target.

And candidly – I would MUCH rather you learn this as a single person because should the Lord have marriage in store for you, it will equip you for it. It's going to help you in deciding on a spouse, and how to function together in marriage. I hope we exalt singleness and equip you to flourish in your singleness. So, you know, we have single people and married people both in our sermon planning meetings for this very reason.

Now, married people. You are the other audience. You know in the New Testament, in Titus the older women are to train the younger women & likewise older men train younger men. But here it is like it's the reverse. The younger couple is to be a

model to you. The song itself is to be like the wind that rekindles the flame. Awake North wind...come, O south wind! Blow... (4.16). So, a question for you is going to be: How's your love life? Is your wedding bed dead or alive? And listen that question is like a thermometer that takes the temperature of your overall marriage health.

So yes, one of my hopes is that our study will lead to celebratory unashamed worshipful sex among married couples in our church. As James says be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.

2. The Song of Solomon is a love song, meant to give us wisdom, in the bible.

We cannot forget this is a book of the bible. And according to 2 Timothy 3.16 all scripture, including this book, is breathed out by God. It's his word to you. That's a huge deal. That means...listen to me this is big...it means this word while being sensual...it is not crass. And we must guard against pornifying this book for our pleasure. This book does not objectify women or men. On the contrary it empowers them both. In fact, this woman speaks more than any other woman in scripture. And at the same time, this book does not shy away from the passion and beauty of sex given by God to a husband and wife in marriage. It celebrates it! Just as the couple in this book will be naked and unashamed so we should share their



lack of shame as we worship our way through this book.

And because it is in the bible, we must recognize its part in the larger story of scripture. See the whole bible is telling you a love story. When we see the bride in this book faithfully pursuing her groom it is a stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel described as an adulteress by the prophets in scripture. We must read this book in light of the person and work of Jesus. Who the gospels call the Bridegroom⁴ and the apostle Paul calls our “one husband”⁵ and the one whose kingdom and consummation is like a wedding feast.⁶ The grand story of scripture is the God who is love, made love, and gave love to Adam & Eve. They rejected that love and all of us have since. But he sent Jesus to redeem us from our sin. To show us true love by dying in our place for our sin. To offer us a way of love, and a new source of power for love, in our short few years of life on earth. And then to welcome us into his kingdom of eternal love when we die.

God is love, God made love, & God gives love. So, pursue his way of love in your life.

I told you this is about human love. But human love is an echo of eternity.

Wedding Ring – SS 8.6-7

⁴ John 3.29; Matthew 9.14-15

⁵ 2 Corinthians 11.2

[6] Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave.

Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.

[7] Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.

CLOSING

Christ's love for his church. Go to the gospel. Invitation to baptism.

PRAYER

- For humility instead of defensiveness
- For men and women to step UP into what God has for them
- For healing

⁶ Matthew 22.2; Revelation 19.7

