

God's word, our world – Sex

Part 2, Song of Songs 1:1-17, 2:14 – 17, 5:2-6

Song of Songs 1:1-17

¹ *Solomon's Song of Songs.*

She

² *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.*

³ *Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.*

No wonder the young women love you!

⁴ *Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers.*

Friends

*We rejoice and delight in you;
we will praise your love more than wine.*

She

How right they are to adore you!

⁵ *Dark am I, yet lovely,
daughters of Jerusalem,
dark like the tents of Kedar,
like the tent curtains of Solomon.*^[c]

⁶ *Do not stare at me because I am dark,
because I am darkened by the sun.*

*My mother's sons were angry with me
and made me take care of the vineyards;
my own vineyard I had to neglect.*

⁷ *Tell me, you whom I love,
where you graze your flock
and where you rest your sheep at midday.*

*Why should I be like a veiled woman
beside the flocks of your friends?*

Friends

⁸ *If you do not know, most beautiful of women,
follow the tracks of the sheep
and graze your young goats
by the tents of the shepherds.*

He

⁹ *I liken you, my darling, to a mare
among Pharaoh's chariot horses.*

¹⁰ *Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings,
your neck with strings of jewels.*

¹¹ *We will make you earrings of gold,
studded with silver.*

She

¹² *While the king was at his table,*

my perfume spread its fragrance.

¹³ *My beloved is to me a satchet of myrrh
resting between my breasts.*

¹⁴ *My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
from the vineyards of En Gedi.*

He

¹⁵ *How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes are doves.*

She

¹⁶ *How handsome you are, my beloved!
Oh, how charming!
And our bed is verdant.*

He

¹⁷ *The beams of our house are cedars;
our rafters are firs.*

Song of Songs 2:14-17

He

¹⁴ *My dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hiding places on the mountainside,
show me your face,
let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.*

¹⁵ *Catch for us the foxes,
the little foxes
that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom.*

She

¹⁶ *My beloved is mine and I am his;
he browses among the lilies.*

¹⁷ *Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
or like a young stag
on the rugged hills.*

Song of Songs 5:2-6

She

² *I slept but my heart was awake.
Listen! My beloved is knocking:
"Open to me, my sister, my darling,
my dove, my flawless one.
My head is drenched with dew,
my hair with the dampness of the night."*

³ *I have taken off my robe—*

*must I put it on again?
 I have washed my feet—
 must I soil them again?*
⁴ *My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening;
 my heart began to pound for him.*
⁵ *I arose to open for my beloved,
 and my hands dripped with myrrh,
 my fingers with flowing myrrh,
 on the handles of the bolt.*
⁶ *I opened for my beloved,
 but my beloved had left; he was gone.
 My heart sank at his departure.
 I looked for him but did not find him.
 I called him but he did not answer.*

Let's have some thinking music ...

*Let's talk about sex, baby
 Let's talk about you and me
 Let's talk about all the good things
 And the bad things that may be
 Let's talk about sex ... Let's talk about sex ... Let's talk about sex ... Let's talk about sex*
*Let's talk about sex for now to the people at home or in the crowd
 It keeps coming up anyhow
 Don't decoy, avoid, or make void the topic
 Cuz that ain't gonna stop it
 Now we talk about sex on the radio and video shows
 Many will know anything goes
 Let's tell it how it is, and how it could be
 How it was, and of course, how it should be
 Those who think it's dirty have a choice
 Pick up the needle, press pause, or turn the radio off
 Will that stop us, Pep? I doubt it
 All right then, come on, Spin*

– SALT 'N' PEPA

Well I have been sitting in my office this week thinking about sex, reading through the Song of Songs.

As those great philosophers of both salt and pepper once said “let’s talk about sex”:

*All the good things and the bad things, that may be
 Tell it like it is, and how it could be, how it was and of course how it
 should be.*

We in the church don’t talk about it – honestly talk about it. We don’t talk about the good things and the bad things. Sometime we just need to tell it like it is and how it should be.

Without going into it too much, sex is a huge part of our society – on TV, in our books, movies, in our advertising. It’s a normal part of how we consume our content. I won’t bore you with any statistics because I don’t think I need to convince anyone.

We love when our celebrities date each other or when politicians have a sex scandal. If Bill Clinton released a massive shift in policy at the same time as Malcolm Gets caught with his secretary, which story would be on the cover of the newspapers? Not a real question because of course it would be the sex scandal.

When it comes to talking about sex in the Bible there is one book above all others that deals with this topic – the Song of Songs. Yet how many times have you heard a sermon or done a study on it? I think I can remember 1 talk on it in my time at church. This is because the church has a lot of baggage when it comes to sex. We have seen sexuality as a cesspool of sinfulness that almost nothing good comes from it and we are best just to never talk about it. This attitude is not a recent one, but it has been around for hundreds of years which means that this book caused a bit of a problem.

How do we understand Song of Songs?

If we know that sexuality is bad then how does the church read this book? When all it does is celebrate sexuality, it's just one long poem about love.

If you go to a theological library, and you look up the Song of Songs section there are the biggest fatter commentaries you have ever seen on a book that is only 8 chapters long!

Because the church for centuries has tried to grapple the Song of Songs. How do we read it when our teaching on sexuality is to repress it? So they approached the whole book as an allegory – a story with a different meaning. They saw this whole book as a metaphor for God and the church. A love story between Jesus and his bride, the church. And all the seeking and hiding, looking and finding is God calling his bride and our searching for the divine creator God.

In the 6th century they banned any reading of the book that was literal. They only would let people understand it as an allegory because they clearly thought it would be highly dangerous to see the book as about erotic sexuality.

And this is the history of the church and sex. There is a fear about sexuality, a serious worry about how the church could handle exposure to this book – fear that it might throw us into some pit of sexual immorality that we couldn't escape from.

I once had a young adult say to me, 'so what's the point of the Song of Songs?' I'm just honestly confused as to why it's in the Bible. Which is a funny thing to say, why would they have this thought?

It was because their thinking was sexuality has no place in the Christian life to the point where we see God's written word as irrelevant because all it talks about is desire and sexuality.

And yet God, through his spirit, saw to it that this book became part of our Bible when they formalised the canon – the books of the Bible – in about the 4th century. If they did that between 5th and 21st century it's likely that Song of Songs would have been left out. But God saw to it that it didn't. God put it in the Bible for a reason.

So let's have a look at it.

Song of Songs is sometimes called Song of Solomon. This is because verse 1 is a bit ambiguous in the Hebrews

¹ *Solomon's Song of Songs.*

Is it saying that this is a song written by Solomon? Or is it a song written and dedicated to Solomon? We're not too sure. So sometimes it's Song of Songs, other times, Song of Solomon

But it's a story of longing, the longing between two lovers. Of seeking and hiding, of separation and pining.

The man looks but does not find. The woman thinks she catches a glance of him (2:8) but is mistaken. They finally unite in chapter 5, then the woman wakes from her sleep, rushes to the door, she can hear him on the other side but:

^{5:6} I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure

In all their seeking there are the obstacles put in their way. The city guard stop her and beat her from running around at night looking for her (5:7) King Solomon shows up with all his entourage and interrupts them (3:7). They are kept apart by all these circumstances and events. Holding back their love, and their chance to be together.

All these things add to the longing and desire they have for one another. At length they describe their desire for each other's bodies. The woman describes her delight in the man's body (5:10-16), His hair his eyes, his lips, arm, thighs. And the man describes his love for the woman's form (6:4-9, 7:1-9). It finishes with what I think is a beautiful section on love greater than death (8:6-7):

She

*⁶ Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.*

*⁷ Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.*

It's a story about the God-given sexuality that we all have – the human experience of desire, attraction and love between 2 people. And the first thing we have to take away from it is that sexual relationships are a gift of God, to be enjoyed. Sexuality isn't something to be repressed or ignored. Man is attracted to Woman, Woman to man – physically and spiritually.

Humanity made in God's image is a sexual being, drawn to one another, but the church historically hasn't been very good at expressing this.

Sexuality is an actively taught as something sinful. Priests have to be celibate, because a wife and sex are ungodly. And even sex in a marriage is only for kids – contraception is a bad thing. As if the only good thing about sex is reproduction. This is how far our amiss teaching on sexuality had gone in the church.

Yet the Song of Songs says something very different. It celebrates the sexual experience between a man and a woman. It promotes it as part of God's creation and purpose for us as his people. Part of the reason that the church has found this book difficult may be because it doesn't mention a wedding, it's not part of the story. But the man does call her his bride 6 times, possibly as a bride to be. But I think more importantly it paints a deep commitment between the two.

2:6 I am yours and you are mine

8:6 for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave.

Which actually echoes our modern marriage vows “forsaking all others”, “Till death do us part”. This speaks of deep commitment between the two.

The Bible isn't anti-sex, it is pro-good-sex.

Sex in the confines of a loving committed relationship is how it's meant to work, is how it works best, it keeps you from being harmed, used or feeling hurt or betrayed.

Because Sex is a powerful thing, it can impact a person – mind, body and soul. It's clearly not just a physical thing – its psychological and spiritual.

Which is why we protect our young people for sexual experiences that could be damaging – not physically damaging but psychologically and spiritually damaging.

For sex to be healthy it needs to be with the right person, at the right time and in the right place.

We know that sex with the wrong person at the wrong time (particularly too early) and in the wrong place can do massive psychological harm.

This is why we have an age of consent. Whether or not you think you ready but you are under 16 then you are not old enough to consent because you're not mature enough to handle it.

But as soon as you turn 16 it we think all is good now, it's just fun, can't do any damage. But that's just not true.

And it is true of adults as it is for minors. Healthy sex has a right person, right time and right place.

But we have a culture that tells us all u need is consent and then anything goes, it's all good – that the only essential thing is consent.

If your first time is with a stranger out the back of a night club next to the dumpsters. A girl I knew years ago, her experience was like that. According to our culture that's fine as long as you consent –that's insanity. Even thinking about in puts a little hole in my heart. There is no way she could remember that experience as a positive one.

Did anyone watch Puberty Blues? Set in the 70s, just after the sexual revolution, and the girls think it's normal to be used as a sex doll. It's just so horrible to watch and the damage it is doing is on all of their faces.

But the Bible tells us that it needs to be with the right person, someone you deeply love; at the right time, in the confines of a commitment relationship; and in the right place, a safe environment.

In this context our sexuality is a blessing. It's the glue that binds to people together – as it says in Genesis, two become one. That's talking about physical, emotional and spiritual connection. Not just something that teenagers do in the backseat of the car or something that happens on the first date but in the right place, at the right time and with the right person, it's how God created us to be.