

Courtship

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[0:00] We're going to look at the Song of Songs Mark's prayed for us. We open Holy Scripture together. And I'll just remind us of where we were last time. We asked ourselves, is this what it looks like?

It seems to be quite a hot love song. Can it really be a love song for human beings? And it begins, let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.

You think, whoa, whoa. And you might say, I thought the Bible was against sex. And clearly, if this is part of the Bible, that can't be the case. And I've got some more answers to that below.

And the question, the other question that we asked ourselves, is it embarrassing for a morning sermon? I suppose the answer is slightly yes. I think, but we shouldn't think of it as being basically embarrassing.

But I think we should think of it as being basically beautiful. And then the question of how we interpret it. What are the people? What's the plot? And we came to the, well, the way we operated last time was to say the girl is a farm girl.

[1:05] She goes out in the fields, works in the fields. So she's tanned, which is unfashionable in those days. And her bloke, well, she calls him the king, like King Solomon and his bride, rather in the way that a couple might think, it's Harry, isn't it?

And Meghan. You know, he's my Prince Harry, she's my Meghan. A bit like that. I think that's the way that it works. And it is, we took it as being a story of human romance.

But, that human romance is designed to be an expression of the divine love for his people. That's what human romance is there to express.

And then we asked, what was the use of it? And I tried to make the case that it's actually extremely useful in this world of confusion.

Because in our society, there's immense confusion about love and sex and gender and so on. And into that confusion, this song speaks loudly and clearly and beautifully, unashamedly, celebrating the unmatched beauty and glory of covenanted, that's to say promised, expressed, clear, heterosexual, sexual love.

[2:38] That's what this song does. That's what we're going to think about this morning. You remember last time I frightened you by saying I'd had a dream. And walking in the woods, it was a thought that did come to me.

Walking in the woods in my dream, I saw, as it were, almost divine creatures walking hand in hand, like Galadriel and Elrond, or Galadriel and Celeborn, like elven creatures glowing with light and wonder, almost like creatures from heaven.

And then I awoke, and what I saw was a pensioner and his wife helping each other up the steps.

And I thought, actually, which is the truer understanding of what it is to be a married couple?

Which is the truer understanding? We should not forget that every marriage relationship is an expression into this world, of something beyond this world, of something divine, something eternal, something with unmatched glory.

So I asked last time, which was the truer view of reality, of what it is for marriage to mirror the glorious relation of Christ and his church? So this morning, I'd like us to go a little bit further.

[3:55] We pretty much got to verse 14 of chapter 1, and I'd like it to go a little bit further, although I think only as far as verse 7 of chapter 2.

And I'd like us to consider the courtship of this couple. So that's what we're going to do this morning, as God helps us think about the courtship of the couple. So I'm going to ask, what sort of

courtship is it?

What sort of courtship is it? What can we learn about it? That's my main question. Try and pick out some features of that. And the subsidiary question, which you might have thought about.

This is all very romantic and intense. So the question you'd ask today is, are they sleeping together? You might not ask them, but you probably have that in your mind. Are these guys sleeping together?

They're not married, but are they sleeping together? And I'd like to give some thought to that question first of all, because it will clear things up for us. So, okay, with me?

[4:58] I mean, let's just ask this question. So the 21st century Western answer is, of course they are. Of course everybody does.

That would be the 21st century Western answer. In Love Island, which I haven't watched, I understand that sleeping together is quick and interchangeable, and you just sort of tick through the list.

That's what everybody does. Certainly in Hollywood, Netflix, boy and girl see each other a bit, or maybe even just meet, and they hook up and they sleep together.

That's what they do. And perhaps even, you know, perhaps I'm treading on people's toes who are actually here. People we know.

Maybe even people here. And yet, God hasn't made us that way. And I suspect, even in today's society, it would be difficult to do that sort of sexual relationship without a bit of guilt, without a sense that there's something a bit empty about this, without some sort of sense of shame, and perhaps some sort of sense of cheapness.

[6:24] I'm sort of speculating. And this is, sleeping together, of course, is not the correct answer. Of course, they don't belong to our world. They belong to a different world.

And I want to show you, they're not sleeping together. Let's give you a second answer. Some modern Bible commentators will say, yes, they're sleeping together. Of course they are. The text says so.

So if you just look at what we read, verse 16, she says, our bed is verdant. So that seems to imply, I mean, it definitely mentions bed, doesn't it?

And it says in 2, verse 6, his left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. That's a very passionate sort of snuggling up, isn't it?

Chapter 5, verse 1, says this, I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.

[7:26] I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey. I have drunk my wine and my milk. So that seems to be speaking of a, not just an imagining, but a tasting of these delights.

Not as something longed for, but as something that has been tasted and possessed. And the commentators would say, there you are, see, they're sleeping together. But I'm going to say, actually, no.

Just read that text more carefully. So 5, verse 1, says, I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride.

So it speaks of them as married. And I would like to say that the other texts are actually texts expressive of something that is being looked forward to rather than had all the way through.

So I'm going to say, no, actually the text doesn't tell us that. I'll give a third answer from ancient Hebrew culture. And in ancient Hebrew culture, which is where this was written, there would have been gasps of horror if the reader had suggested that the couple were sleeping together without being married.

[8:48] God, no. No. No respectable family would permit that of their daughter. That would be an awful thing. She'd be in ruin. She'd be, the talk of the village, it would be an awful thing.

So, God forbid. It would be an awful thing. And a shameful thing. You just think of some of the examples from the Hebrew scriptures. Do you remember Old Testament?

Joseph, who was taken, sold by his brothers. Not a very nice thing to do to your brother. Sold as a slave, sent into Egypt.

The Lord was with him. He found himself in a rich house with a rich master who had a wife. He was called Potiphar and she was presumably Mrs. Potiphar.

And she fancied Joseph and she made many efforts to get him to go to bed with her. And he resisted.

[9:52] And at one point, he sort of had to run away from her and he ended up in prison. And the way the story is told, the way the story is told, it says to us, do you know, it would be better to be in prison with the Lord with you than to get tangled up sleeping with a married woman or sleeping with a woman you're not married to.

That's what the story says. It says, that's God's way. It's better to be in prison than to go down that route. Or you might think, maybe you can call this one to mind, of Mary, the wife of Joseph in the New Testament.

They were, there's a sort of system that we don't operate as a sort of betrothal. And during that period, she became pregnant. Do you remember that?

And as the story is told by Matthew, there's a huge, what's the word, conflict in Joseph's mind.

I know she's a good girl. I know she's an honorable girl, but she's pregnant. I mean, what am I going to do? And it says, Joseph was a righteous man and did not want her to, did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

[11:12] He had in mind to divorce her quietly. So the disgrace that would have attached to sleeping together without being married would be huge in that culture.

And so from that point of view, I would say, no, they're not sleeping together. And it's fashionable to think that we in the West are progressive and we've got, we understand much more than ancient cultures and we're so much better and more wise and sophisticated.

And I would say, actually, our Western culture has become primitive and foolish in this matter. And those ancient cultures had a much more wholesome view of the way sexuality was supposed to work.

And I would say, the song itself says no. It has development. There is a development, I mean, they clearly love one another and they're clearly looking forward to being married.

But I'd like to point you to verse 6 of chapter 3, which looks to me like the groom arriving for the wedding and she puts it in royal terms, a little bit like Prince Harry arriving to wherever it was.

[12:26] Was it Westminster Abbey? I can't remember. And Meghan Markle coming along and everything. And she says in 3.6, Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?

Look at this, Solomon's carriage escorted by 60 warriors, the noblest of Israel, all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with the sword at his side prepared for the terrors of the night.

King Solomon made for himself the carriage. He made it of wood from Lebanon. Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem.

Come out, you daughters of Jerusalem. Look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced. It looks to me like that's the wedding day.

That's when they get together for being married. And I'd say that the song employs the language of longing, which is distinct from the language of already possessing.

[13:33] So when it says our bed is verdant, I think it's looking forward to that day. Say, I look forward to that day when we will share a bed together. And I look forward to the day when we're in a house, the beams of our house are cedars.

I'm looking forward to that. And the song actually is specifically and explicitly conscious of the need to wait.

And you get it in that last sentence that was read, 2 verse 7. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

And that's a repeated refrain. It's there in 3, 5. Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. And it's also somewhere else.

It's also in 8, 4. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. So the song has built into it the importance of the right time and waiting for the right time. [14:52] And it has a consciousness that there is a huge pressure to get ahead of yourself that it says no, no, no, no. Do not awaken or arouse love until the right time.

And it's interesting that it's called, that there is a call to, let me just see, daughters of Jerusalem. So the person saying this, the lady actually saying this bit, is calling on her companions, the other daughters, her social group if you like, cousins and aunts and other people.

Help me with this. You lot, I charge you, don't, don't get me going down that path at the wrong time. Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. So my question was, we approached the thinking about their courtship, are they sleeping together without being married? And we thought the answer, yes, everyone does, but actually, no, everyone doesn't.

We said, yes, the text says, but no, it doesn't, only if you read it carelessly. And no, in that culture, that would have been unthinkable. And the Bible is against that.

[16:07] The Bible teaches waiting. It's biblical ethics, it's there in the Hebrew scriptures and the Greek scriptures, the Old Testament and the New Testament. And the Bible says, yes, there is a desirable, beautiful, physical consummation of love.

Yes, there is. But, the Bible guards this within the bounds of a relationship which is promised, as undertakings, promises that you can depend on, public, because the daughters of Jerusalem know about it, so it's not just a secret thing, you know, in sort of one night stand that nobody knows about type of thing.

It's public and there is a commitment in this heterosexual bond that we call marriage. That is what the Bible guards and carefully surrounds and protects this sexual union within those boundaries. So I just wanted to step back and just have a comment on it. So, people who are here might listen on the internet, if you're thinking of becoming a Christian and you have a sexual partner but you are not married, married, or if you're trying to be a Christian and you have a sexual partner but you are not married, then you absolutely need to consider this as a matter of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

You need to consider it seriously and potentially you need to think of it sacrificially. you're in a situation that the Bible says that's not a good place to be.

[18:09] And it might take quite a while to sort that out or it might be actually quite a simple matter. There may be situations where a believing person is in that relationship and maybe that relationship is long standing and the wise course of action is to perhaps patiently and humbly seek that the partner might engage in marriage.

And that's a wonderful thing. And that would be probably the wisest course if it's a long standing relationship just to make that the way God wants it to be.

There's also the possibility that this relationship is sort of an uncommitted short term relationship and the real discipleship thing to do is to say no.

I cannot carry on in this to renounce that relationship as a disciple of Christ. And we've got the testimony of a couple of ladies in the church for whom that was a key event.

They knew they were in a wrong sexual relationship. They knew that it wasn't sustainable and at considerable cost to themselves and indeed in a costly way they just had to say I'm so sorry but this can't go on.

[19:32] I've got to leave you. And that's what they did to follow the Lord. And if you're trying to be a Christian or thinking of becoming a Christian and you're pondering shall I enter a sexual relationship with somebody I'm not married to I say don't do that.

Just know. Don't even think about that embarking on such a relationship. Okay. That was the first question which I think we have to ask in our culture as we come to this text.

Are they sleeping together? And they're not. A little footnote on the marriage between God and his people and the marriage between the Messiah Christ and his church.

Jesus brings two or possibly three revolutionary teachings. Teaching number one that he personally is the bridegroom.

Now in all the gospels I think this comes as a shock. We don't necessarily read it that we just think oh we knew that anyway. But in John's gospel one of the first revelations of Jesus glory is at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

[20:49] I think that's very significant. In the other gospels they talk about fasting and I don't actually think Jesus replies about fasting.

He says can the guests of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? And he's saying I'm the bridegroom and I think that's a revolutionary teaching.

And the second revolutionary teaching that Jesus brings is that there is a waiting period between the beginning of the kingdom and the consummation of the kingdom.

I think to his listeners might have done a double take at that. They've waited all through the centuries for God to fulfill his promises and bring in his kingdom.

And then Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is near but there will be a waiting time before it finally arrives. And if you think of the number of parables that Jesus taught about waiting, the seed grows and you wait, the wheat and the weeds grow together and you have to wait till the harvest.

[22:02] And even at the end of the Bible, a waiting period, Jesus says, the risen Jesus says, I am coming soon. I'm not here yet.

but there's a wait and then I'll be here. And the church says Amen, come Lord Jesus.

We don't want to wait forever but we have to wait. But the sooner the better. Would you not agree, Christian person, the sooner the better, the sooner the better we see the Lord, the sooner he comes the better.

even so, come Lord Jesus. And then my third teaching, if you're conscious that you've gone wrong in this, and I think you certainly wouldn't be alone in that, think of Jesus as he speaks to the woman at the well.

And the thing about the woman at the well was her really messed up sexual life. Do you remember Jesus says to the woman at the well, go and call your husband. And she says, I haven't got a husband.

[23:07] And he says to her, well, you're quite right, because you've had five husbands, and the man you've got now isn't your husband. So he knew. But I think it's so impressive that Jesus didn't sort of denounce her and make her feel absolutely terrible and say to people, look at this terrible one.

He just said, I know. Yeah. And to people who have messed up sexually, there is a compassionate saviour who says, yeah, I can cope with that.

And then, you know, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Those who come penitently, honestly, openly to the Lord Jesus, he says, I can clean that all away.

You don't have to live a life filled with guilt and shame and wishing things had been done differently. that's all gone. I make all things new. It's a wonderful promise, isn't it?

It's a wonderful saviour. So, that was the first bit about the courtship. No, I'm picking your pardon. That was the first bit about the question of the sleeping together.

[24:19] So, let's look at some more about the courtship. So, I want to say a few things. I think we've got five or six of them. First thing, I think there's equality, but not interchangeability.

So, I have to keep saying this. The beauty of this is that they're two different types of creature together. It's a heterosexual relationship.

So, I've got here the word yafe, which means beautiful or handsome. And it is used, if you like to look at it, in verse eight.

Most beautiful of women. And then verse 15, the man says to her, behold, you are, I think he says you are yafe.

And then he says it again, behold, you are yafe. Forgive me if I'm not getting the vowels quite right, but it translated, how beautiful you are.

[25:26] How beautiful. And he says to her, you're beautiful. The word is used, it can be used of a man.

And she says it to him in verse 16. She says, you are yafe. Translated, how handsome you are. But most of the time it's used the other way.

Now let me just see. 4, 1, how beautiful you are, my darling. Verse 7, all beautiful you are, my darling, there's no flaw in you.

5, 9, how is your beloved, better than others, most yafe, most beautiful of women? 6, 1, where has your lover gone, most yafe, most beautiful of women?

Chapter 6, verse 4, you are yafe, you are beautiful, my darling. Chapter 4, verse, what have I got? Verse 4, you are beautiful, my darling.

[26:34] Verse 10, who is this that appears like the dawn? Yafe as the moon, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun. So, although there's a little bit of interchangeability, she's beautiful, he's handsome, she's beautiful.

It's used of Sarah, Abraham's wife, she was yafe, and of Joseph, actually, he was a good-looking young man, that's why Potiphar's wife fancied him.

It's used of David, he was a good-looking man, it's used of the cows in Pharaoh's dream, actually. But here, it is strongly weighed as the way a man speaks to the woman.

And she has a word for him. She calls him my love or my lover. So, Peter's helped me with this, but I think it is dode as the noun and dodeca as a possessive.

She uses this word of him, and I haven't put the references, have I? So, let me just get you the references. So, in verse 16, she says, you are handsome dodeca, my lover.

[27:59] And that's the word she uses for him, and it pops up a lot of the time. Let me just tell you where it comes. It comes in verse two, your love is more delightful than wine. wine, and it's in verse four.

We will praise your love more than wine, and it, I should have written this all down. Chapter two, verse 17, turn my lover.

So, she's got a word for him. It's not interchangeable. It is primarily a word that she uses for him, dode. And you know this is an interesting word, because in other contexts, it is uncle.

Context is important, but this just makes me think, if you say to, if she says to him, calling him my lover, she uses a word which can't help but remind you of uncle.

I don't know how that would work in English. Maybe people have got some other cultural context behind them would find a parallel. It just sounds remarkable that when she's speaking to him, she uses a word which can't help but remind you of being family.

[29:27] My, I don't know how to do it, my sweet one, same way you talk to your uncle. people. It's an interesting thought, isn't it? And I think this reminds us that the romance here is not like a western romance where it's a boy and a girl miles away from family, they just do their own thing together, they're not connected to anybody else.

It's a family thing. So the family will say, here's a nice young man, what do you think about him? And they'll say, yeah, this is good. And the family are involved in this too.

Certainly like that in Sri Lanka. He calls her my darling. So I haven't done the translation of this. He calls her my darling.

Most of the time, he calls her my darling. Most of the time she calls him that once only. So you get a sort of vocabulary that fits distinctively to each member.

So equal but interchangeable. So the beauty of this is the marvellous combination of unlike creatures. She's got a special word for him, he's got a special word for her.

[30:49] She sees something particular in him, he sees something particular in her. Let's move on. This courtship, mutual affection. Let's carry on through the verses. So verse 15.

He says to her, you are beautiful, my darling. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves. doves. She says this to him a bit later on.

Your eyes are like doves. I think, why? We've been experimenting to try at home, gentlemen. Why doves?

Well, one thing is doves are renowned for hiding because they go and hide out of the way. So maybe he's saying that there's something sort of secluded about your eyes. Or maybe not.

And I think I have to say I've got no real idea why he says your eyes are doves. peace. Well, it could be peace. It could be, couldn't it?

[32:01] I just wonder whether peace is a modern thing, whether peace is a, I mean, Noah had a dove, didn't he? Yeah, yeah. Well, I, so, sorry? Yeah, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove.

Yeah, that's true. I'm just going to copy what one of the writers said, and he said this, gazing deeply into someone else's eyes is surely one of the most personal experiences possible.

That's right, isn't it? Gazing deeply into someone else's eyes is one of the most personal experiences possible. Future expectation in this courtship.

They call each other things, they express appreciation of one another, and there's a future expectation. So I'm going to come back now to verse 16, and I'm going to say this is an expectation. She says, how handsome you are, how yaffer you are, my dodeca, my lover, and how charming, and our bed is verdant.

Verdant means green, but it means growing as well. A little bit more than just the colour scheme. It's a sort of idea of fruitfulness. our bed is fruitful.

[33:21] I'm just pondering whether the Song of Songs has much to say about children. It might have that in the back of its mind, but it's not saying that a marriage is only fruitful and beautiful if there are children.

It's not saying that. but she does say our bed is verdant. There's something sort of like a wonderful garden, if you like, about our bed.

It's not empty. It's not a stolen pleasure. It's not a guilty pleasure. And he replies to her, if the NIV is right in making it work that way, he replies to her, the beams of our house are cedars, our rafters furs.

So a little bit of grand designs here. Kevin is going to come in later and say, was it under budget or over budget? But anyway, so which one is it? NIV says it's he saying this.

What was he saying? It's not just about architecture. It's saying, as we look forward, we're going to have a bed, we're going to have a house. And it's going to be a good house.

[34:33] The beams of our house are cedars and the rafters furs. It's a secure home together. Again, I'm going to quote from the commentator, the enduring firmness of their relationships which provides the solid materials from which to build a family together.

They look forward to a bed and a home. Future expectation. Heartfelt affirmation. So let's go on down to 2 verse 1.

She says, I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. Now then, that sounds beautiful, but I think actually what she's saying is a little less certain than that.

I think she's saying, I'm just like a little common flower. A rose of Sharon sounds very grand, but the commentators say it wasn't a very grand flower at all.

It was just a common or garden flower. flower, and she's saying, I'm just a common or garden flower, actually. Jesus talked about the lilies of the field, didn't he?

[35:44] I think he meant common or garden flowers. But he says to her, you're beyond compare. She says, I'm just common or garden. He says, no, actually, to me, you're beyond compare.

Like a lily among thorns, verse 2, is my darling among the maidens. So he says, don't compare yourself to all the other flowers. Think of all the thorns, they're horrible.

You are a flower amongst thorns, as far as I'm concerned, he says. I think that's rather lovely, isn't it? You're beyond compare to me.

A lily among thorns, despite what you may think about yourself, you are completely special to me. Despite what you think about yourself, you're completely special to me.

So I'll now use an exegetical tool called Downton Abbey. So here, in case you don't know, this is Carson, who's the butler.

[36:49] That's Mrs. Hughes, the housekeeper. Carson is a single man, very proper and a little bit snobbish and she's Scottish and she won't stand for any nonsense.

And as things go on, they actually, he proposes to her in their older age. And she's a bit embarrassed by this. And as it dawns on her what she's being asked, Mrs. Hughes sends a coded message to her fiancé, Mr. Carson, via the cook, Mrs. Patmore, regarding what is expectations from his bride, who considers herself old and potentially disappointing and unlovely.

So the text goes something like this. Mrs. Patmore sort of blushing tries to present this message and Carson gets the point and he says, tell her this, Mrs. Patmore, that in my eyes she is beautiful. Mrs. Patmore, oh, I see. you may say if she asks if I want a full marriage, the answer is yes, I do.

[37:56] I want a real marriage, a true marriage, with everything that that involves. And I hope I do not ask the indelicate when I send you back to relay this message. Oh, don't worry about me.

I love her, Mrs. Patmore. I am happy and I am tickled and bursting with pride that she would agree to be my wife and I want us to live as closely as two people can for the time that remains to us on earth.

Heartfelt affirmation. She says, I'm a common flower and he says, to me, you are beautiful. You are beyond compare. And Mrs. Patmore says, well, you couldn't make it any clearer. I'll say that for you. And I take from this, here's some good advice. Married couples should not tire of praising each other. It's such a miserable thing if all wives and husbands can think to say about one another is to complain, isn't it?

We ought to be keeping on saying nice things to each other. And I'm just going to step back from this as Christian people because this reflects on Christians and their Lord.

[39:12] again from the commentator. Although we are one amongst billions, the Lord treasures us constantly as individuals, delighting in the beauty he has bestowed upon us as a glorious gift of grace.

And whether we're married or single, Jesus, we might say to Jesus, oh, I'm just a common flower. But Jesus says to me, actually to me, you are a lily among thorns, you are special to me, in my eyes you are beautiful, and I love you.

That's what the Lord says. Heartfelt affirmation. Number five, distinctive praise. So she says, so she's now saying in verse three, some things about him.

He's going to say some things about her, but she says some things about him. Now, she's really looking forward to being married. And she can say this about him, like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men.

I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. It's an interesting thing for her to say about him, isn't it? We've got to take ourselves to a hot, dry country, presumably dry, tree.

[40:41] And if you've been in that sort of climate, you know that trees are wonderful things because they shade you from the sun and they produce a sort of little humid microclimate, so they're very pleasant to be under the shade of a tree.

In Sri Lanka, you've got to be careful under the shade of a tree because coconuts can drop on your head and smash your skull. They're a great huge heavy thing, bang, like that, so you've got to be careful sitting under the shade of a tree.

But she says, I'm not worried about that. He's like an apple tree. I sit under his shade, and not only do I get the shade, but I get the sweetness of the fruit, sweet fruit.

I think she's saying, perhaps in a very poetic way, you make me feel safe, and your company refreshes me and sweetens my life.

It's a lovely thing for this young lady to say about her bloke, isn't it? You make me feel safe, and your company sweetens and refreshes my life.

[41:45] And that's a praise that she gives to him. I just wanted to say, if a young lady can't praise her chap, then she has no business marrying him.

And for people who may or may not be contemplating marriage, if your future partner, if you've got nothing good to say about them, don't marry them. Don't marry them.

He's like an apple tree. I delight to sit under his shade, she says. Distinctive praise, let's just step back from this.

I think Christians can say something similar about their saviour, can't they? He makes us safe. He restores my soul.

He sweetens my life, and not just for the years that we have left, but forever. Isn't that true about Jesus Christ? And if you've come along this morning, not a Christian, perhaps just pondering these things, I'd like to offer Jesus Christ to you as the shade and shelter and sweetness that you were made for.

[43:03] And perhaps what you've been seeking all your life is found in him. There's a thought. Distinctive praise.

Let's go a little bit further. Impatient. Well, is it impatient or is it patient? She's looking forward to it, but she's waiting. And she looks forward to this. Verse 4. He has taken me to the banqueting hall and his banner over me is love.

Now, I pondered about singing that song. Now, some of you remember this. He brought me to his banqueting table and his banner over me is love.

Okay, right. Don't get carried away. Because I looked at the literal translation, is my house of wine. He brought me to the house of wine. And I think, I don't know whether we want to sing that to the Sunday school.

Do we? Brought me to his house of wine. That's what it says. And his banner over me is love. So there's my beautiful picture of the table. Wine is there.

[44:05] There's something sort of rather celebratory about it. Some rather uninhibited with the caption over it is love. love. And she says, I'm lovesick and longing.

You know, I long for the day that we're together. So she says, strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples.

I'm faint with love. I'm love sick. Looking forward to this time. I don't know, do people get lovesick nowadays? Lovesick loons.

Somebody who's completely lost the plot because he's seen some wonderful girl and just, oh, you know. Anyway, that's the condition she's in. I'm just longing for this time.

I look forward to the day when we will be together and I will be totally his. His left arm is under my head. his right arm embraces me.

[45:11] It's a way of saying I'm totally his. I'm totally in his arms. I'm totally in his hands. I'm looking forward to that day. But, she says, verse seven, please don't get me started on that because I have to wait.

Friends, daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you. That's actually quite a strong word there. I make you swear. I think it's Shabbat.

Is that the well of swearing? Or am I, it's the well of seven, isn't it? Anyway, it's a strong word there and she says, look, I want you to promise me this.

I'm really depending on you to help me with this. I charge you, don't awaken love. don't arouse all of this longing because I've got to wait until there's the right time.

And if I may say, this is a call on courting couples to be patient. All the hormones are going in a completely different direction. But, friends, there is a right time.

[46:25] There is a time to wait for. And I say, this is a call on society to help people with that. Now, our society does the exact opposite, doesn't it? Our society puts before all of us the prospect of sort of random promiscuous sex non-stop all the time.

But she's saying, please, will you people around me help me with this to be patient for the right time? And if I can just compare this to the Christian life, as I think it's right to keep on doing, there's a call on the Lord's people, too, to be patient.

The Apostle Paul said, you know, I find the attraction of being with Jesus Christ such a strong thing. And I contemplate that and I think about that.

And, you know, I would like to depart and be with the Lord, which would be far better. I really would like just to go straight to that point. But he says, this is in Philippians, he says, but the Lord has got other plans.

I need to wait. I need to be here. I need, he says, it's for your benefit. In other words, he means, I've got some service to do. There's some work to be done.

[47:44] There's some help to be brought. And until that is accomplished, only after that will I have that better thing. I've got to wait. There's a right time. And I'd like to encourage all of us.

We're here waiting for the Lord, if we're Christians. That's what he's taught us, to wait for him. And in that waiting time, there's work to be done.

There's service to be done. We're here for a purpose. We're here for the benefit of his kingdom. We're here for the benefit of the Lord. We pray, your kingdom come. That's what we prayed right at the beginning.

But we know we've got to wait for that. But we will get there in the end. And in the very famous passage that often gets read at Christian funerals, it says, we will be forever with the Lord.

We will be forever with the Lord. So we will be with the Lord forever. He says, encourage one another with these words. It's a good thing to encourage one another with, isn't it?

[48:47] Lots of things we can encourage one another with, but let's not omit this one. One day we will see him face to face. That's what makes it all worthwhile, isn't it?

That's what it's all about, isn't it? We will see him. We will be with him. So that's as far as we're going to go.

But here's a little footnote about those who are thinking about, as it were, going out with Jesus. Jesus. So you're sort of getting to know him a little bit. It's not quite a courtship yet, but it's sort of a little bit going that way.

And maybe you started spending time with him, hanging out with him in the Bible and reading it.

And maybe you've had enough courage to address him and talk to him and start praying.

Lord, if you're really there, show yourself to me. If you're really there and these things are really true, then convince me of it. And I don't know how far you might have got down that road, but there will be a time when he says to you, shall we name the day?

[49:57] There'll be a time when he says to you, okay, we've been hanging out, but really what I'm after is that we would make this a public, permanent, totally committed relationship.

relationship. It's like a proposal, isn't it? Jesus will say that to you. Leave your old life and come away with me, he'll say.

Leave everything behind and come with me. And when he says that, I would love you to leave everything behind and say yes.

Yes. Thank you.