

Song of Songs 6:4-8:14

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Preacher: Robert Kinney

- [0 : 0 0] You'll want to turn back to the Song of Songs passage, as that is our passage for this evening, as we conclude this enigmatic book, looking particularly at chapter 6, verse 4, through chapter 8, verse 7.
- But first, let me pray. Great God in heaven, purify my heart and cleanse my lips, that your voice may be heard.
- Give us your spirit that we may understand your word, and love and do your will to your glory. Amen. Amen. We are, once again, digging into one of the more difficult and uncomfortably explicit portions of Scripture.
- Remember from our first exploration of this book a few weeks ago, it is graphic in vivid detail. It is historic, meaning it is about a man and a woman.
- And it is Christian, meaning it has something to teach us about God and the gospel. So, our text before us is all poetry, which means we must look at it according to the rules and features of this genre.
- [1 : 2 8] And so, rather than trying to argue the logic or argument of the text, it really doesn't work that way, I want to point out three themes in our passage. Love is exclusive, love is enduring, and love is eternal.
- Love is exclusive, love is enduring, and love is eternal. So, looking at 6.4 to 8.4, let's take the first two of these themes, the themes of exclusivity and endurance.
- We're going to take those themes together. In 6.4 to 10, the man speaks. He uses a series of physical descriptions, some of which we have seen previously in the text of Song of Songs.
- To be fair, they may not seem like the most flattering metaphors. You know, your hair is like a flock of goats. Your teeth are a flock of ewes.
- Your cheeks like halves of a pomegranate. I'm not sure my wife would like those, but, you know. You can see pictures of these metaphors interpreted literally, literally, if you Google search, what is it?
- [2 : 4 7] Song of Songs and Woman, and you do a Google image search. You can see people's pictures of this interpreted literally. Which, by the way, be very careful how you Google search Song of Songs and Woman.
- Just saying. But, by the standards of ancient Hebrew poetry, these metaphors are perfectly appropriate and generous.
- And, I mean, if you think about it, these metaphors actually aren't substantially more ridiculous than some of the things we hear in the Billboard Hot 100 or read online anyway.
- So, literally, she has nice hair. She has straight white teeth, which is definitely attractive in a woman.
- She has all of her teeth, which is also definitely attractive in a woman. She has full, rosy cheeks. But notice how he moves through the physical descriptions to her uniqueness.

- [3 : 54] She's not only beautiful, but she is so uniquely. She's one of a kind. This feature is most apparent in 6, 8, to 10, if you look there with me.
- There are 60 queens and 80 concubines and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one. The only one of her mother.
- Pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed. The queens and concubines also, and they praised her. Who in this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners.
- Notice the progression here. 60, 80, so numerous as to be without number. Notice the trajectory of an inverted sort of dual progression.
- Queens, concubines, virgins. From the highest rank in the royal court to the lowest. From the many to the masses, this woman stands alone.
- [5 : 04] She is the perfect one. In his mind, she is the only one. She is her mother's favorite. The queens and the concubines cannot help but praise her.
- She is beautiful and uniquely so. In 6:11 and 12, we turn to her. She's left to go and see if love is ready.
- Perhaps she is making preparations for a night of lovemaking. Perhaps she is checking to see if her lover is ready. But as she checks, she is beset by desire.
- The time has arrived. And in 6:13a, the young maidens beckon her back. Come back to the party so that we can look upon your beauty. And in 6:13b, the man steps in.
- Why should you get to look upon her? He then turns to her and picks up again his description in 7.1 to 9a. But notice here it becomes far more intimate.
- [6 : 08] He describes the parts that really only a husband should see. Her feet, her thighs, her navel, her belly, her breasts.
- Only to return to the parts that would be more regularly visible. Her neck, her nose, her hair once again, and her mouth. In Song of Songs 7.6, we have something of a summary of his exclamation.
- How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights. And then with 7.9b, we see the beginning of her second speech.
- She begins by acknowledging her husband's obvious desire for her. The desire about which he has just been singing. In 7.10, she says, I am my beloved's and his desire is for me.
- Then in 7.11 to 8.3, she once again beckons him to lovemaking. But again, notice how she begins. Look specifically at 7.12. Let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded.
- [7 : 19] This is no impulsive decision to commit to physical intimacy. They are ready, in one sense.
- Yet they go and double-check that, in fact, it is the right time. I am ready, but are we really ready? She seems to be asking.
- The answer is yes. She then describes the act in fairly sweet and surprisingly not terribly explicit detail, at least by the standards of this book.
- But even so, having waited until the right time to arouse passion, she finishes her poem with a warning. Notice it there. It is the warning we have already seen twice in 2.7 and 3.5.
- I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. So, let us stop here, take a step back, and look at the big picture of what we have just seen.

- [8 : 24] In short, we saw two longer poems by the man in 6.4-10 and 6.13-7.9. They go through physical descriptions of the woman focusing particularly on her uniqueness.
- She is the only one he wants. She is the sum total of his desires. Then she offers her own poem in 6.11 and 12, and another poem in 7.9 to 8.4.
- And while she ultimately gives in the desire and beds her husband, her poems both focus on waiting and making sure it is, in fact, the right time. Concluding with her familiar warning to the young maidens not to arouse love until it pleases.
- So, I want to take a step here of looking at these two themes. His desire for her alone and her uniqueness, and her sense of waiting until the right time, because I think these are two of the more important themes, two of the more important lessons for young men and women of any generation, but yes, this generation.
- Young men need to learn about monogamy. And young women need to learn about waiting until the right time. I'm a little uncomfortable putting it in these gendered terms, if only because each individual is different and struggles with different things, and I get that.
- [9 : 57] But I did do some reading this past week in subjects like evolutionary psychology, especially as it relates to mating. And there do seem to be some important facts that we must face.
- Numerous scientific studies have suggested that men consent to sexual behavior faster than women, less selectively than women, and prefer short-term relationships more than women do.
- In other words, men are going to have a hard time focusing on one woman and committing in a long-term way. Their struggle will be to commit to one woman to be given uniquely to one woman.
- out of all the queens, out of all the concubines and virgins in the world, men, we must have eyes for only our bride.
- That's what I mean by exclusivity. And it's tough. I mean, the man here, I think, is an example for us. Perhaps, ironically so, given the Solomonic aspect of this poem.
- [11 : 11] You know, Solomon who had all of these concubines and wives. This poem, I think, stands as an indictment of Solomon for what he did not do.
- Commit to a long life of walking past all the other women. The married men in this room need to do just that. Avert your eyes, politely move on, focus exclusively on the one uniquely given to you.
- Women. The woman's poem here is a slightly different message. It is the message of wait until the right time. Endure until the right time.
- I mean, given the scientific conclusions that men are less selective and consent to sexual behavior faster than women, the greater pressure then on women is to give in to sexual behavior.
- It seems like a bit of a circular argument. It is a circular argument. But it is one that plays out, I think, regularly in society. I mean, we have literary and cinematic tropes to the point of cliché, actually, that, you know, there is the young man and he is putting pressure on his girlfriend to have sex for the first time and she doesn't really know what to do.
- [12 : 31] I mean, this is every movie, isn't it? Yeah. The pressure is universal. And there's a reason that while giving in to her desire for sex, the young woman in Song of Songs is wholly focused on enduring until the right time.
- What is the right time? I would argue from the context of this book, it is a monogamous marriage. I mean, we skipped the wedding bits in chapters three and four, but I think the context of this book is perfectly consistent with what we see in the rest of Scripture.

The right time is marriage. Her point, then, to the young women is about timing. Passion and desire and physical enjoyment are good.

Puritans, I think, had that one a little bit wrong. It's good. But you absolutely need to wait until the right mate and you are rightfully joined in marriage to that mate to indulge.

Or to put it differently, I think this is the title of chapter six of Josh Harris' *I Kissed to Date and Goodbye*. The right thing at the wrong time is the wrong thing.

[13 : 51] Let's look at our third theme. Eternal love. Several scholars have suggested that the climax of the book is found in 8, 5 to 7.

You might remember several weeks ago that when we got to the middle of Job 28, there was this chapter-long interlude on the nature and definition of wisdom. I think we have a similar thing here, an interlude.

So chapter 8, verses 5 to 7. Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I awakened you.

There your mother was in labor with you. There she who bore you was in labor. It begins in verse 5 with a vision of the woman clinging to her beloved.

It is a tender, non-sexual image. She finds a home. She finds protection. She finds comfort in the arms of her husband.

[14 : 50] Then it shifts to her perspective. She says that she awakened him. She awakened love and that they were now home, possibly in the home that, or orchard, that used to belong to his parents.

But then with verse 6, she demands something from him. 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. It's flashes or flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. 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 foolish. Like the seal a king uses as he presses his signet ring into hot wax to seal a letter or an official document, she wants his love upon her in an official, final way.

Why? Because love is permanent. Notice the metaphors here. Death and grave, fire, the very fire of the Lord, something that won't sink, even in a flood.

[16 : 06] They are all metaphors that convey certainty or permanence. His love is unstoppable and unendable. It's eternal. Nothing can stop it.

And so here in this interlude we have, I think, the closest thing to a definition of love that we get in the whole book. Whatever love is, it is constant and everlasting. It will not be undone.

And it's from this last point that I wish to bring forward an application for everyone. Like the previous themes of exclusive and enduring love, there is an application here for the relationship between men and women.

A proper marriage relationship, likewise, will be permanent. Just as a man is to, at the right time, give his love and attention exclusively to one woman, it is to be a substantial love that is unbroken.

From the first exciting days of marriage through the tough times for richer, for poorer, sickness, and in health, to the last days when bodies begin to fall apart and a lifetime shows in the wrinkles of skin.

[17 : 19] The man is to love his wife and likewise she is to love her man to the end. For the marriage vows are an unbroken promise of eternal love.

But this isn't just about marriage. As we have seen, we do learn something about the relationship between God and his people here as well.

Hosea 1-3, Ephesians 5, etc. The marriage relationship is an illustration of that between us and God. As exclusive, enduring, and eternal as the love is between man and woman, between husband and wife, it demonstrates something more profound about how we relate to the Lord.

So, it's not just about being exclusively focused on our spouse. There's a lesson here about the exclusive claim of God on his people and our need to worship him only.

Chapter after chapter in both testaments demonstrates what happens when we take another God besides Yahweh. I mean, we actually recited it in the law earlier, right? You shall not make for yourself an idol, you shall have no other God before me.

[18 : 34] But even more so, the love between God and his people is a permanent one. Remember the metaphor that the poet used, for love is strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave, its flashes are flashes of fire the very flame of the Lord.

God's love for us is eternal. We know this because it was demonstrated with the ultimate cost. the sacrifice of his son upon the cross that we might be saved and come into a right relationship with him.

This is the ultimate love. It is a love that transcends even death. For Christ rose again sparing us God's eternal judgment and fire. So as we look at our human romances to our marriages, we should also see through these to the demonstration of God's eternal and permanent love to us.

Paul states this in, I think, marvelous terms in Romans 8, 31 to 39. And so it's with those verses that I want to conclude. what then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[20 : 05] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God who is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us so much that you would send your Son to die for us.

thank you that he rose again and defeated death that we might come into relationship with you for all eternity. Help us to live in such a way that especially to demonstrate in our marriages the fullness of your love for us.

[21 : 34] We pray this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.