

PM Song of Songs 2:8-17 "Arise my love and come away"

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- [0 : 00] This evening. The voice of my beloved.! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains,! Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. For behold, the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone, and the flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.
- The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom. They give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.
- Oh, my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face and hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face is lovely.
- Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine, and I am hers.
- [1 : 23] He grazes among the lilies until the day breathes and the shadows flee. Turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains.
- Pray that God will bless the reading of his infallible word this night to us in Dumfries. Well, as the Bible begins, and the triune God creates the world, he creates a beautiful garden paradise.
- He creates everything that we see around us, all that we enjoy in this world, and on the sixth day, he creates man and places him in the garden. And if you know the story of Genesis, well, you know that Adam was tasked with naming all of the animals, wasn't he?
- And they were all in pairs, male and female. And there's no doubt you could imagine Adam there naming the foxes and the tigers and the bears and all these things and giving them names and noticing that they were all in pairs.
- And he probably thought, after a while, didn't he? Well, where's my other? Where is the pair for me? Where's my helper suitable? And the Lord God said, didn't he, amongst the members of the triune God, it's not good for man to be alone.
- [2 : 43] I will make a helper suitable for him. And you know the story, he puts Adam into a deep sleep, he pulls out the rib, and he creates Eve out of man. And for the first time in his life, Adam begins to speak in a poetic way, doesn't he?
- Much like a young man who falls in love. For the first time, he begins to speak soppy things. He begins to speak things where he would be embarrassed if his friends found out. And he says, at last this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.
- He's overjoyed with Eve, isn't he? And Eve becomes the mother of all of the living. And you could look at that Garden of Eden story and you could say, well this is a beautiful tale of romance, isn't it?
- And it certainly is. But as we look at marriage and the gift of marriage that God has given, it's actually portraying something much more glorious.

The Apostle Paul, when speaking to the Ephesians, said that I'm speaking to you of a profound mystery here as I speak of marriage. I'm speaking to you of the relationship between Christ and his church.

[3 : 54] A beautiful union which will last forever, in which there's no divorce, and in which the husband always remains faithful until the very, very end. The marriage of all marriages, Christ and his church.

And I would suggest to you as we come to the Song of Solomon, we see both those things again. In the Song of Solomon, on one level when you read it, it is a story of romance, isn't it?

There's the Shulamite woman, and there's the shepherd boy who has won her heart. On one level, it's just a tale of human romance, but on another level, it must be a story of Christ and his church.

And because this isn't just the Song, this is according to Scripture, the Song of Songs, the greatest of all songs. In Hebrew, when you want to speak about how great something is, you don't usually add extra words, you just repeat yourself.

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Song of Songs. This is the greatest and best song in the universe, the romance between Christ and his church. And so what I want to do this evening is just come to this passage.

[5 : 06] We don't have too much preaching in the Song of Solomon anymore. I know there's a, believers and preachers will preach on it from time to time. But I just want to approach the book and just show us how to handle it a little bit, just looking at chapter 2 together.

at this amazing moment when the beloved comes to his soon-to-be bride. And so we're going to do two things as we come to the passage.

At first, we're going to look at the lessons it teaches us about human love. And because there certainly is a lot about human love in this book. And secondly, we'll look at what this book teaches us about heavenly love.

And about our relationship with Christ. And now if you are a believer tonight, I trust this will be an encouragement to you of how much the Lord Jesus thinks of you, how much he's done to make you his.

And that you'd be able to rejoice in your saviour. And perhaps if you're not yet a Christian, that you would see the glory of belonging to Christ. And you would say, where can my soul find him?

[6 : 15] How can I be put into a relationship with him? How can Christ become my husband and I become his bride? So with that in mind, let's just walk through the story together and learn the lessons firstly about human love.

The lessons of human love. Well, because we're jumping into chapter two, let me just remind you of what's been going on before.

And the Song of Solomon, as Sinclair Ferguson says, one of your own, a theologian from Scotland. He says, reading the Song of Solomon is a bit like watching an opera. I don't know if any of you have been to witness an opera, but there are different scenes in the opera, aren't there?

There's something that happens and then the curtain comes down, the stairs shuffles and it goes to the next scene. And now in the first scene, the bride, soon to be bride, has been talking about how much she loves the king.

In verse two of chapter one, she says, let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love. He's better than wine. Draw me after you, let us run. And all other such things.

- [7 : 25] The woman wants to be with him. And what's his name? Well, she doesn't need to give his name because when you're in love, there's only one person that you have your eye upon, isn't there? It is him.
- Where is he that my soul loves? The woman will say. She wants to run after the shepherd boy. She wants to be with him. But it's the early days of the relationship and she's feeling very insecure.
- She says in verse five, I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kadar and like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me.
- My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards. So it's a country girl. She's out in the country. She's made to work the field.
- She's poor. She doesn't have money. And she looks upon this kingly shepherd prince. And the good part of this story is she doesn't just have to look from a distance.
- [8 : 27] No, he is interested in her as well. In verse eight, it says, If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, follow in the tracks of the flock and pasture your young goats beside the shepherd's tents.
- He says, If you want to find me, I'll be with the sheep. That is the shepherd boy in the song of Solomon. And the woman continues on all throughout the story being unsure of his love until they get married and it ends in marital bliss in chapter eight where there is a commitment to one another forever.
- But now in chapter two, the marriage hasn't taken place yet. If we were watching the opera probably in verse eight, we would be arriving now at a new scene. Chapter one has shown you the courtship.
- It's shown you all the difficulty of being in a relationship, all the ups and downs, all the anxieties. But now we're on to another scene. What's going on?
- The woman's at home now. This language of the garden, this language which reminds us of the garden of Eden, it kind of just vanishes for a moment. And we see human language again.
- [9 : 39] The woman is at home. She's behind the wall, verse nine. She's gazing through the window. She's looking through the lattice. It's a very human moment in this Eden paradise which is the song of Solomon.
- So the woman's at home. You can imagine the scene. She's looking out of the window and then carried on the wind. She hears the voice of her beloved. Look at verse eight with me.
- The voice of my beloved. Behold, he comes leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. At first she hears his voice.
- If you were watching the opera, perhaps you would hear him whistling a song on the hills or singing a psalm. Who knows? But you would hear his voice in the distance. And then slowly but surely the voice gets louder and louder until he comes.
- And this young man, he's not shy about making the effort, is he? He comes leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. If a man likes a woman, he'll put the effort in, won't he?
- [10 : 50] A simple bit of marriage advice for you there. A simple bit of courtship advice. If a man's actually interested, he'll go leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. He'll get on the train.
- He'll make the drive if he's actually interested. The world pays money for this kind of wisdom, doesn't it? There was a book in 2000s called He's Just Not That Into You, which made exactly the same point as the Bible does here.

If a man's interested, he will go running after his woman. Love makes a way, doesn't it? Love makes a way. He's bounding over the hills, verse 9.

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. We get plenty of stags in New Zealand, plenty of gazelles running around on the hills, and they are swift, and they are purposed, especially if you're trying to shoot them to make a new bag of sausages.

They go bounding over the hills, out of the way, and you don't see them again. But here is the man, and he's going towards his woman, and he appears at the family house, doesn't he?

[11 : 57] Look at verse 9. Behold, there he stands, behind our wall, gazing through the window, looking through the lattice.

And what's the point that's been made here for us? Well, it's going to sound very old-fashioned, it is. But the woman has staid at home until she's got married, hasn't she?

What was it saying in Genesis? For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother. She's staid in her own community until the wedding day. She hasn't gone out flatting with her friends.

She isn't living with the shepherd boy at this point, no. She's staid in the family house. And there's nothing wrong, let me say this, because it's something the young people need to hear, there's nothing wrong with staying at home until you get married.

Nothing wrong with it at all. Everything wrong with cohabitation, moving in together. The shepherd boy had too much, too much virtue for that, didn't he?

[12 : 58] Too much love for the woman, and the woman, too much love for him to do what God had called them not to do. There are principles here for dating, there are principles here for courtship, it's all in your Bible.

You don't need to watch a TED Talk or buy a dating book. It's all here in the Scriptures. Everything we need for life and for godliness. So he comes to the family house, and what's his, he got on the agenda?

Is it going to be next, is it going to be Netflix and chill? Is it going to be something untoward, something he shouldn't be doing? No. He invites her out for a simple stroll, doesn't he? Look at verse 10.

My beloved speaks and says to me, Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. For behold, the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.

That kind of puts most of us men to shame there with the romance, doesn't it? Most of us can't even sort of imagine a poem, but here he is speaking wonderful things to his bride.

[14 : 09] He's saying the conditions are perfect for a walk, to enjoy one another's company, to get to know each other even more. And these are basic principles, but they're important, aren't they?

It's important to get to know the person you're going to marry. It's important that you can spend time with them, and getting to know not just their face and their appearance, but knowing their voice and their personality.

Not like Samson. Do you remember Samson in the book of Judges? What did he say about Delilah? She looks good. Go and get her for me. It's all well to look good, isn't it?

But what about the voice? What about the person? What about actually getting to know one another? The Bible says that you're going to spend a long time with this person. So it's essential that you get to know each other really well.

All these simple principles which you find in the Scriptures. Verse 13, he continues his poetry. Look with me there. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom.

[15 : 13] They give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. Oh, my dove in the cliffs of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff.

Let me see your face, and let me hear your voice. For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Now, it's funny how the language changes in different cultures, isn't it?

A bit later on, he's going to talk about having a nose like the Tower of Lebanon. And that sounds quite offensive in our culture, doesn't it? And I don't suppose any of the women hear that your husband's called you a dove.

Maybe they have. But this is sort of Eastern love language, isn't it? And maybe you'll sort of get a sense of this. Have you ever noticed at a certain time of year, in the spring, you see the wood pigeons together in the tree, don't you?

The mating pair, if you're paying attention. And the wood pigeon, the dove, mates for life. It chooses another wood pigeon, and that's it.

[16 : 14] Exclusive commitment. And he's saying to this woman, you are my dove, you're the one I've committed to. At this point, of course, they're betrothed, the wedding day is going to come eventually.

And there's an important principle here, isn't there? They're already committing to stay together forever. Those of you who are married, you know what it's like.

You get into arguments, you find out that you're living with another sinner. And that sometimes in your flesh, you can think, wouldn't it be easier if I just pulled the plug out? And wouldn't it be easier if I just gave up on this whole thing?

We might not admit it, but those thoughts come to us sometimes. You know, the example of biblical love here is that we commit to someone for life till death do us part.

It's an important principle. It's one that the scripture speaks to us. Now, it's not so obvious in the ESV here in verse 15, but now the speaker changes.

[17 : 19] Now it's the woman speaking back to her beloved. And what does she say there in verse 15 to him? Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes which spoiled the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.

In Gisborne, where I'm from, we're from a winery region. We have many, many vineyards. It's hot enough to grow grapes there. But thankfully there's no foxes, there's no predators at all in New Zealand.

But if you're in a country like Italy and you went to the vineyard, you would see these little foxes. And especially the young ones, they like to go down and chew on the roots and pull them and break them. And what happens if the roots are broken, if everything's falling to bits?

Well, the fruit doesn't appear. And so what's the woman saying here? Well, she wants the man to take the lead in protecting her, in keeping her from sin, in setting the tone for the relationship.

Catch the foxes for us, she says. And that's our responsibility in courtship as men and in marriage. I don't think I see many young men tonight who might be courting.

[18 : 35] I think most of the younger men here look married. But these are things which you can pass on to your sons, aren't they? It's your responsibility to keep one of God's daughters safe.

To do the best by her, both when you're courting and when you're married. You are responsible as a man for what happens in your home. To catch the little foxes, the things which are spoiling the vines.

And this could be too much screen time for the kids. It could be not enough family worship together. It could be all sorts of things. It could be harsh words spoken together between a husband and a wife.

Well, it's our job as men with the Lord Jesus' help to catch those things, to nip them in the bud. That's our responsibility. Catch the little foxes for us, the woman says.

And in verse 16, it's wonderful to see how now she's more assured of his love now that he's come and invited her out on a walk. Verse 16, she says, My beloved is mine and I am his.

[19 : 40] He grazes among the lilies. And the men have wives, they feel more cherished when we show our love for them.

I'm quite bad at this. If my wife was in the congregation, she'd be saying, Amen. You need to show more love to me. You need to cherish me. You need to show me more of the love of Christ which he has for his church.

All of us as men could be better at this, couldn't we? And to love those who God has given to us. If you're married, that's your role, isn't it? As a husband, yes, to lead.

But more than that, to love, to love as Christ loved his church. Well, with a man like this, a shepherd like this, who's looking after this kingly shepherd, it's no wonder that she wants to be with him.

She wants the wall to be gone. She wants to be in his presence forever. Look at verse 17. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on the cleft mountains.

[20 : 46] And when's the day when the shadows are going to flee when she doesn't have to worry about some of the distance and carefulness anymore? Well, it's on the wedding day, isn't it? When she can be intimate with her husband, when she can be together with him forever.

Until that day, she waits patiently for the time of consummation. It's a great love story. There's probably so much more in this that you could glean out of it.

You say, well, Luke, I'm not having married this evening. I'm single. I wish I did have a wife or a husband, but I don't. And so all this talk, it just seems a little bit painful to me, actually.

It just reminds me of what I don't have. And it's true, isn't it? We do live in a fallen world. We live in a world where there's divorce, where there's unfairness, where all kinds of sins spoil the vineyards of love.

That is true. We all experience that. What hope, then, is there for one who's single, one who's divorced, one who's just made a mess of the good things that God might have given to them, one who's been betrayed, even if it's not their fault?

[21 : 56] What hope is there for a person like this? Well, it's this which leads us on to our second point, isn't it? Because this isn't just the tale of human love. This is also a tale of heavenly love, the love of Christ for his church.

The love of Christ for his church. So let's ask the question, then, how do we relate these things to Christ without going insane? Without pulling too much out of the text which really just isn't there?

Well, I think you'll find that there's actually a lot of the Lord Jesus in this passage. What's the first thing we see in verse 8? The voice of my beloved.

What did Adam and Eve hear when they were in the garden of Eden? They heard the voice of the Lord in the cool of the day, didn't they? They would have heard his voice, seen his face, known him.

It starts off when there's first-to-first communication, when they could hear his voice clearly and they didn't have to ask, do you think the Lord is speaking to us? No, there was his voice in the beginning.

[23 : 06] He would say, of all the trees of the garden, you may freely eat. In Eden, they heard God, they walked with God and they knew God. Until the serpent came in Genesis, freed, deceived them and God had to cast them out of the garden.

But let me ask you, did the voice stop there? No, it didn't, did it? The voice of the Lord continued. In fact, even as Adam sinned, there was the voice of the Lord speaking and what did the Lord say?

He said, Adam, where are you? And that voice is still speaking today. There's a wall of sin which is up. We have made a separation between ourselves and God through our union with Adam, through our own sinfulness by choice.

There is a wall, there is a separation, but there is a voice which speaks from the other side of the wall, the voice of the Lord. And all throughout the Old Testament we hear that beautiful voice, don't we?

Promising to send his son, promising to send one who would crush the serpent's head and undo everything which went wrong in the beginning. He spoke through his people, he spoke through the prophets, didn't he?

[24 : 23] He sent prophet after prophet to point people back to God to say, your maker is your husband, return to him, return to him, return to him. The voice of the Lord through his prophets.

That is the testimony of the Old Testament. But then, praise the Lord, it wasn't just a voice, was it? Just as in our story, what happened first? The voice of my beloved, she heard the voice.

But then, behold, he comes. And aren't you glad that the Lord Jesus came? He wasn't like a father who breaks his promise to his children, even though he doesn't mean to.

He has all the best will in the world, but not the ability to carry it out now. He spoke, and then he also came. He came to this world, didn't he? Born of a virgin, born under law, that he might finally redeem those who'd been slaves to the fear of death all their life.

Behold, he speaks, but no, behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains. How many difficulties were there for Christ to come into this world? He had to leave the glory of heaven, he had to humble himself by becoming obedient to death, be found in a body of skin and bones, suffer hunger, suffer thirst, nakedness and shame.

[25 : 47] How many hills did Christ have to cross over even before he came to Calvary? But he did it, didn't he? Because love makes aware. Just as a young man will drive, as I did, back and forth to London all the time when I was caught in and thinking absolutely nothing of it, the Lord Jesus Christ, he went over all the hills of difficulty to find his bride.

And the book of Hebrews said that he even did it joyfully, that it was for the joy that was set before him, that he enjoyed the cross, despising its shame and is now sat at the right hand of the Magister.

So we heard his voice in the Old Testament, he came in the New Testament and is here now by his spirit, isn't he? He's in our midst this evening saying, Arise my love, my beautiful one and come away, calling his people out of sin and to himself.

You know, sometimes when you look around the church building, it doesn't look all that impressive what we're doing this evening, does it? You've got a strange English man speaking to you from New Zealand, but in reality, spiritually speaking, Christ is making his appeal through me to you.

He's saying, come away my people, those of you who already know me, come into a deeper intimacy with me. Shut yourselves in your chambers and come away a while, pray to your father who is in secret.

[27 : 22] To those who are outside of Christ, he says, lay down your rebellion and come to me and I will give to you rest. for behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth.

Spiritually speaking, it's the springtime, isn't it? Christ has risen from the dead and the first fruits of the new creation are appearing and eventually there's going to be a harvest time.

Eventually, Christ will come and he will say, arise my love and come away and that will be it. Until then, he calls people to come to him but there's coming a time when he will appear in the clouds with fire and bring the world to an end when he'll gather up the elect from the four corners of the earth, it says in Revelation, thrust this sickle in and harvest this world.

What an awesome thing that the Saviour has not only spoken, he not only came, he not only, offers us the Gospel that he's coming back for us as sinners. He said, if I go away I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also.

So, wow, what an amazing Saviour we have, what an awesome God, what an awesome Gospel and it is. So, what do we do in the meantime?

[28 : 54] What do we do whilst we wait for the day to break and the shadows to flee? Well, we ask Christ to catch for us the sins in our lives, the little foxes that are ruining our relationships and brothers and sisters, are they not there if we're honest?

Are there not things in your life which you'd be embarrassed about if we put them up on a big screen over there? In my life, in your life, yes there is. we need God's help to catch those little foxes, those sins which spoil our witness, which destroy our fruitfulness.

And what will the Lord Jesus say? No, no, you should be better than that by now. You've been a Christian 30 years, 40 years, 50 years, some of you. I've had enough of you. No, he won't say that, will he?

He'll be gentle and gracious and patient. A bruised reed he will not break, a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. He is gracious, he is patient with his people.

So until the day breaks and the shadows flee, we keep looking to Christ, remembering what he's done for us, asking him to change us. We should do that by reading the Song of Solomon and being reminded of how much Christ loves us.

[30 : 12] Because it's been written for our instruction. The Song of Solomon is a part of Scripture just as much as John's Gospel, isn't it? And it has wonderful things to teach us about Christ.

I've been speaking of a profound mystery here, but I'm speaking about Christ and his church. Let's ask a few questions as we close off tonight.

Well, it's been great to come to this Old Testament book. As the Lord Jesus told us in Luke 24, all these things are about him. Let me ask you, are you reading the Old Testament looking for Christ?

If not, then you should be. You're missing out if you're not reading the Old Testament because it is full of the Lord Jesus. Full of wonderful things that God has done and we can look back on it and say, he has done all things well.

He's accomplished everything which he set out to do. Are you reading the Old Testament? Are you searching for the Beloved in these Old Testament books?

[31 : 19] Because he's there, he's on every single page. Let me ask the parents, are you thinking about training your children to understand biblical courtship, to understand these simple principles which have been lost?

and the Bible has much to say to us as fathers, as mothers, which we can teach our children and we can help them maybe avoid some of the mistakes we've made and which others make in our society.

Are we learning even our doctrine of marriage and courtship? Are we getting it from the Bible? Or are we getting it from the world? All scriptures God-breathed and profitable for correction and teaching in doctrine, isn't it?

That the man of God might be partially equipped? No. Thoroughly equipped for every good work. Including teaching your children about how to select a partner, about biblical courtship.

It's all here in the scriptures and more fundamentally than that it all points to Christ, doesn't it? He speaks through his word, he's spoken by his son, he speaks through sermons to you, he speaks through other believers.

[32 : 31] He is still speaking, calling you out of the world, calling you into greater fellowship with himself. Have you heard his voice? Have you come for the first time and said, God be merciful to me, a sinner?

Have you come for the thousandth time saying, Lord Jesus forgive me of my sins? Are you pointing others to Christ and telling him that he will receive them if they would but come?

I pray that we'd be doing that. I pray that we'd be doing that until the day comes when he takes us home. Until then let us be grateful. The spirit and the bride say come, have you come?

And if you have are you rejoicing in this saviour, the one who is King of kings, Lord of lords and our heavenly husband? Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.