

The Passion of a Love Song

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[0:00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 25th of January 2004.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled The Passion of a Love Song and is based on Solomon chapter 1 verse 1 through to chapter 2 verse 17.

Amen. The Passion of a Love Song Right, that's enough of that.

Enough for mood setting. There have been some great love songs that have been written throughout time. But in the first verse of today's passage, we are told that this is the song of all songs.

It's not a song of many songs, but is the song of all songs. It is the most beautiful song.

[2:01] It's the number one. It's top of the pops. It's the greatest song of all. What lies before us is a single song, a love poem, rich in imagery, much of it sensual.

The subject of the song? Love. Not a philosophical treatment of love, nor a sex manual, but a rhapsody of love. And our pouring of feelings between two people who are deeply in love.

They are experiencing it in the flesh with all its pains and all its blessings. There is an intense intimacy in this book.

I don't know if you felt it as it has been read. A certain awkwardness, an uncomfortableness, a certain embarrassment. We've been brought into this world, this intimate world.

They don't see us. The words that they speak, they speak to each other. The things that they do, they do to each other. We are like a fly on the wall, given a bit of a window of an intimate relationship.

[3:11] This is a book for those who want to know, or perhaps want to remember, what love is like. And what it is to make love.

So let's begin. Let's have a look at the way that this romantic tale begins. We see there that, as it says, it is the song of songs, which is Solomon's.

We are told here that this song has been written either by Solomon, or it was written for Solomon. A man who had many wives, a man who wrote many songs. A man of great wisdom, who understood much of the world.

This song was written for him, or it was written by him. So knowing these things, that this is the great song, that it has not Solomon's name attached to it, let us listen out for the first voice that speaks.

And the first voice is that of the woman. Here we hear her giving vent to her deepest feelings, her deepest desires.

[4:15] Follow with me as we look through verses 2, 3 and 4. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. As we work through this book, you'll see that it is full of imagery.

Look in verse 2. Look in verse 2.

She wants to be kissed by her lover. Not just a formal little peck on the cheek with some cold lips. She wants a deep kiss.

She wants a deep kiss in her own. She wants to know that fond embrace. The next part talks about the effect of this intimacy, this love making.

It is compared to drinking of wine. I've only become a wine lover in the last couple of years, so I'm not a connoisseur by any stretch of the imagination. But I have tasted one or two good reds.

[5 : 47] And a good red in the mouth is very soft. It flows very easily down your throat. It is a great drink to have with a meal.

Here she describes him as wine. He is better than wine. He is intoxicating.

His smooth lips and teeth are those of the kisses. It is savoured and the memory of that lingers long after the tasting.

In verse 3, she extols the fragrance of her lover's scent. This may seem a little strange that back then that men should be putting on perfume. It's a bit wussy, isn't it, for men back then to be wearing perfume?

But you have to remember that men of ancient Israel didn't have running water. They were hot, sweaty men. And so they would have perfume to cover up this natural smell.

[6 : 52] But to her, this perfume is intoxicating. It's something that just blows her mind. Even the mention of his name is like a perfume.

Well, there's no wonder that we see there that the maiden's heads are turned. That people look at him as he goes past. Here is a man to be praised. In verse 4, we see there that she refers to him as her king.

The most powerful male in her life. Here is the language of love. Because if you look in verse 7 a bit further on, he's but a shepherd boy. But to her, in her eyes, he's a prince.

He's a king. Such imagery. The language of love. Well, the king, she calls out to her king.

Draw me after you. Let us make haste, she cries out to her king, expressing her deepest yearnings for intimacy. This fourth verse finishes with her singing out her praises.

[8 : 02] Not just by herself, but she gathers in all the maidens. In the next verse, we hear that these are the daughters of Jerusalem. She gathers them all in and they all sing out his praises. For he is worthy of it.

As we go through this book, these daughters of Jerusalem will come up many times. And each time they come up, they come up for us as a bit of a sounding board.

Here at the moment, she wants the greatest amount of praise heaped on her lover. And so she brings in the voices of these maidens. Well, the mood changes in verse 5.

After expressing her deep yearnings and longings to be with him, she now speaks to these daughters of Jerusalem. And she becomes a little defensive.

She says, I am black.

[9 : 05] Yes, I am. I am black. Like the goat hair hides of the tents of the desert nomads of Arabia. She is also like the Solomon's splendid tapestries in his palace that are dark.

Yes, she is dark. But there is a reason for that. We look there in verse 6. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me.

My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me the keeper of the vineyards. Here we see that the reason why she is dark is not because of her cultural background, but because she has been forced by her angry brothers to go out and work in the fields, in the vineyards.

And so she has a dark, unkept, wild complexion about her. It's obviously a part of this culture. These daughters of Jerusalem, these city dwellers who are part of the palace, for them being very pale was beautiful.

For her being dark meant that she was of low status. She was a labourer. But here she says, look, I've been forced out.

[10:14] And because of that, she says at the end of verse 6, because of this, my own vineyard I have not kept. That is, she has not looked after herself. She has not looked after her sexuality, the way that she comes across to people.

Her looks, her dress, everything about her appears to be unkept. But she says, I am beautiful. The woman no longer addresses the daughters of Jerusalem.

This moment of tension passes. And because of this tension, perhaps, she calls on her lover to organise a secret rendezvous. She wants to meet him as he goes out and looks after his sheep.

She wants this midday meeting. Perhaps the possibility of some loving encounter. Tell me where, tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flocks, where you make it lie down at noon.

For why should I be like the one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions? She doesn't want her, she doesn't want her, she doesn't want her, she doesn't want her fishing around in other people's tents. Like a harlot, that's the picture there of the veil.

[11:29] She doesn't want to be fishing around other people's, she wants to know where he is so that she can meet up with him. They can have a private moment. A moment of intimacy. A moment where they can explore their closeness.

Well, his response is a coy response. Somewhat of a teasing response. If you do not know a fairest among women, follow the tracks of the flock and pasture your kids beside the shepherd's tents.

Here we have a very pastoral scene. He wants her to cover up her tracks. Get yourself some goats and follow the track and we'll meet up. But do it in such a way that no one knows that we're there so that we can be out in the fields together, out of the public eye, out of the way of the daughters of Jerusalem.

He calls her, O fairest among women. In the next verses, 9 through and following, he then starts to talk further about this great love, his great admiration that he has for her physical beauty.

Look there in verse 9. I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. Well, this week I tried that on my wife. Michelle, you are a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.

[12:51] She didn't seem that impressed. It's often difficult, isn't it, when we're in different cultures to try and understand what type of imagery he's trying to evoke here.

Some have rightly said, I think, that the imagery is that of these chariots. Pharaoh had many chariots, but they would be pulled by stallions and they would go off into battle.

But a defensive plan against these stallions and against the chariots would be to put a mare on heat in the middle of them and it would drive the stallions wild.

It would distract them. Here he says that she is someone, someone who drives men to distraction.

She is someone who drives men crazy. She is so attractive. In verses 10 and 11, he continues to talk about his admiration of her, but concentrates more on the jewellery and her adornments that she has.

[13:56] Look in verse 10 and 11. Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you ornaments of gold studded with silver. Here he sees her in all her finery with her Sunday best, decked out in fine shawls, veils, sashes, with tiaras, earrings, necklaces, headbands.

She's dressed out in all this beautiful adornment, but it only enhances her beauty. It only enhances the natural beauty that she has.

Here we see in the Song of Songs a place where it's saying that jewellery and what we wear isn't prohibited. Often throughout time, we've wanted to play down our natural beauty, to cover it up, to hide it.

But here in the Song of Songs, here he talks about the way that jewellery and adornments actually makes the body beautiful. But I guess there is a warning here, isn't there?

Because we can become so consumed with our outward appearances. We can allow our external appearances to dictate our self-esteem. I don't know if you've seen the number of television shows that deal with this outward appearance.

[15:17] Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. There is the new show, Makeover, I think it's called. There's another one, What Not to Wear. There's all these shows dealing with outward appearances.

We can allow our outward appearances to consume us. It can be a means of hiding our deep insecurities. It can be a means of creating an image that perhaps doesn't need to be created.

We need to be careful the way that we do use our adornments. That we do, I guess, celebrate our natural beauty but not abuse it.

Well, the woman responds to these beautiful compliments in verses 12 through to 14. She speaks of her love and her lover in terms of very fragrant spices.

While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth this fragrance. In her dreamy eyes, her king is sitting on a couch and she is close and intimate with him.

[16:26] Her perfume, that of nard, wafts over the whole scene. A scene of closeness and intimacy. Well, this closeness is articulated in a very powerful and suggestive image in verse 13.

My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts. He too is sweet-smelling, been likened to a sachet of myrrh which she imagines him close to her in her most intimate place, her breasts.

In verse 14, she draws another comparison which reveals her deep desire for him. Here's a cluster of henna blossoms found in the vineyards of Engedi.

Now, Engedi, so I'm told because I've never been there, is meant to be a beautiful oasis, a place that is surrounded by ruggedness. She is, this is a beautiful place, a place of water, waterfalls and streams, a place that is hidden and private, a romantic place.

Here again we see the very rich images that are used, rich images that play upon our senses of taste and touch and seeing and hearing and smelling.

[17:47] How often do we get dulled by our drab lives of not taking time just to admire the beauty that is around us? Well, what follows is a duet of mutual admiration, like two lovebirds staring into each other's eyes.

They try to outdo each other with admiration. After hearing the way that she describes him, he then describes her in verse 14, sorry, verse 15.

Ah, you are beautiful, my love. Ah, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves. Again, the cultural thing is hard to work out here. Is it just the shape of the bird that is like her eyes? Is it the softness of the bird's feathers that reminds her of her eyes?

Or is it the colour? It's very hard to work out, I guess, in many ways. But what is clear is that this is a compliment. Well, then she responds, Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved.

Truly lovely. She admires his physical presence. He is truly lovely. She then changes the scene a little bit and starts describing the place of their closeness and intimacy.

[19:00] She describes it as the couch which is green. The beams of our house are cedar. Our rafters are pine. Here we have this image of a forest with a little green grassy area in the middle of it.

The trees form the walls that are around them. It is a beautiful place. A place of intimacy. A place of closeness.

A place which is in the country out in the open air. It is interesting thinking about beauty, isn't it?

Often, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is not just skin deep. Beauty is, it can come from within. It is interesting that as a society, we try to put down those things that are ugly or ordinary.

But those things that can even be ugly and ordinary with a beautiful spirit can shine through. How often do we praise each other the way that this song praises each other?

[20:13] Well, in verse 17, sorry, in verse 1 of chapter 2, it continues. This, this imagery changes, though, to that of flowers.

She begins with somewhat of a negative description of herself. She is a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. Here is a common description for herself. Perhaps she's fishing for compliments or just flirting with him or perhaps she just genuinely feels unworthy of the man's admiration.

But here she feels as though she is nothing. There are so many other like her. But the man picks up on this image in verse 2. Look what he says. As a lily among the brambles, so is my love among maidens.

Oh, she may be a simple lily, but compared to everyone else, oh, she is beautiful. They are just rough thorns. It reminds me of many of the movies that we have, many of the fables that we listen to.

The Ugly Duckling. You know, the Ugly Duckling, sort of, you know, not very pretty, but turns out to be a beautiful swan. Cinderella. One of the movies that Michelle and I enjoy is pretty woman.

[21:24] You know, there is all these movies and things that we see that start with someone who is, you know, in rags, living in a hovel, yet they possess extraordinary beauty.

And the prince, the king, well, he comes along attracted to that beauty rather than all the other women of the world. So we have this picture before us. Well, the woman then replies to this compliment and likens him to a fertile, luxuriant-scented apple tree in the forest of ordinary trees.

Notice how each other stands out in each other's eyes. It's like everything else is dull, but there's this bright light shining on her. And for her, him. We see there that with this tree he provides protection, security for her, a place where she can shelter and blossom.

It is a place where he can provide emotional and psychological strength to the woman and bring to her great pleasure. In verse 4, she tells about a time they've been brought to a banquet house, a house, which is here, a house for drinking of wine.

Well, this could be a tavern. It could be a room in a palace. It could be a private residence. Many see it as in verse 2 that this drinking of wine, this place of drinking of wine, is really talking about her lover's mouth and about the deep, intimate kissing.

[22:54] He's inviting her to join with him in kissing, deep kissing. Perhaps it might be any of these, but it's actually an image is what is important.

That's what's important here. It's this image of sensual associations. He is intoxicated by her. The verse then goes on to describe his intention towards her.

It is that of love. That is, his banner over her is love. It's this picture of a military where the military have their great big emblems that they would hold like a flag above, marching out to war, indicating who they belong to.

Here he says that he has got her marked out. His intention for her is love. He has stamped her as her own for all the public to see.

Here we see belonging and inclusion and commitment. The intensity of this love leaves her physically weak in verse 5. She is needing sustenance.

[24 : 01] Sustain me with raisins. Refresh me with apples for I am faint with love. Here she is exhausted. She is overwhelmed emotionally and physically by the love of the man.

But she must have more. She desires to be sustained and refreshed that she may go on. She desires more great, she has great desires. Look at what verse 6 says.

Oh, that his left hand were under my head and that his right hand would embrace me. A picture of intimacy and closeness. this beautiful picture of intense love then comes to a very abrupt halt.

Like a wet blanket has been thrown over the whole thing. Like a break has been put on to this whole scenario. I adieu you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does.

Do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready. She speaks again to the daughters of Jerusalem, her sounding board. She speaks to them and says, don't awaken love.

[25 : 16] Don't let it start if it cannot proceed. Wait for the love to blossom. Wait for there is an appropriate moment so that they can go for consummation.

She wants their love to be consummated but she knows that now is not the right time. They must be able to meet the rigours, both the physical and the emotion. Love is not a passing fling but a demanding and exhausting relationship.

They must overcome all the obstacles in their way that they may be together. In the next part from verses 8 through to 17 we see there I guess a glimpse of some of the obstacles that are there.

In verses 9 through to 17 the man is calling out to her, calling out to her to come out and enjoy the spring time. Come out and enjoy their love. Come and be together.

But in verse 9 we see that she is behind walls and windows and ladders. There are obstacles there. In verse 14 we see there that she is in the rocks, in a cliff.

[26 : 30] She's up in the rugged mountains. She's hidden from him and he desperately desires to see her, to hear her voice. Again, obstacles in the way. Verse 15 there are metaphorical foxes treading on their relationship.

There are many obstacles in the way. This refrain in verse 7 comes up a number of times through the book.

It creates anticipation and suspense. It suggests that the relationship is moving on. She is saying to these daughters of Jerusalem, don't awaken it. Wait, be patient.

She is saying it will happen, their relationship will be consummated. And we see that in chapter 8. But until then, take it slow. It's an encouragement for us to look for progression, to look towards the climax within this book.

So our passionate, lovestruck woman, with all ardent desires and yearnings, will, like all others, have to learn to wait. For it is only in the security of their future marriage that she will be able to experience the fulfilment of her deepest longings.

[27:40] well, I must say that this week has been a very difficult week for me. I have waded through many commentaries trying to understand what this book is about.

Many have even suggested why is this book in the Bible in the first place? We live in an age of mass media.

The exploitation of human sexuality is all around us. We are bombarded from every side, ad boards, TV, movies, videos, novels, computers via the internet, promiscuous sexual gratification in public display, accepted on all parts of society.

Love has degenerated into lust, liberty into licentiousness, desire for instant immediate satisfaction. The permanency of relationships is out.

The result, domestic disintegration, unmarried fathers, unmarried mothers. love is a great book to be reading.

[28:53] Compare the picture I've just described of our society to the picture that we've just had a glimpse of so far, of the love and the intimacy, the way that love should be.

Look at the beauty of it. Sexuality is not sinful. love is a precious gift from God and it is so easily to destroy it.

Therefore we need to be praying for one another. We need to be caring for one another and looking after one another. We so cleverly rationalise our desires. We make excuses for our lack of control of our bodies and our lives.

We need to be ruthless as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. that if things that we see, hear, touch or read cause us to start this wrong chain of reactions then we should refrain from it.

We should run away lest it should spiral out of control and find the fulfilment in illegitimate ways. This is a great book.

[29:59] We need to be caring for each other, praying for each other, looking out for one another. We need to be praying for the married couples, those who are single, those whose marriages have broken up.

We need to be praying. God's gift is a very precious gift. It is a gift of love that is found within his very person, within his very nature.

A gift so clearly seen in the sending of his son into this world to die for us. what a precious gift this is. May we care for it the way that we ought.

May we do this by God's Spirit's help. Amen.