

The Pain of a Love Song

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of February 2004.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled The Pain of a Love Song and is based on Solomon chapter 3 verse 1 through to chapter 5 verse 8.

Some of the darkest moments for me as a child was in my dreams. It was a time that I would have nightmares of snakes.

Growing up in the country, you had many snakes around, but in my dreams there would be snakes coming at me from all different angles, biting and trying to devour me.

I would be petrified. I'd wake up screaming. This tension between reality and dreaming, seeming to be crossed and the snake appearing to be really there, biting me.

[1 : 08] Of course, I would go and seek some comfort from my parents and I'd crawl in on the edge of their bed. Of course, when I got to the later part of high school, I had to stop that. But I had many nightmares and many dreams.

I remember one particular of after being down in the city and seeing that huge great dam they call Sea, to hear that there were these vicious things called sharks.

And I remember one particular dream being walking along the sand and a shark leaping out of the sand as though a trap grabbing hold of me and dragging me into the sand. So much was my understanding of sharks.

In today's passage, we continue looking at this great love song, the song of all songs, the song of love. And in chapters 3 to 6, we are brought into the woman's dreams, a dream where she's dreaming about her wedding day, dreams of lovemaking that will follow.

As we look through these chapters this morning, we will see there that there are things that we would expect in those type of dreams, erotic fantasies, nightmares, fears of losing her lover, romantic transformations of her lover into a prince and her own wedding day turning into a grand royal occasion.

[2 : 34] Just for those who weren't here last week, we saw the couple, a naive country girl and a male shepherd lover. They are passionately in love.

They're beginning to explore the delights of an ever-increasing tactile relationship, the thrills of discovery, the longing that they have for consummation of their relationship. Yet we saw at the end of last week's sermon that there are obstacles, there are fears, there are things that hold them back from consummating their relationship.

They must wait for the appropriate time. We saw that our author last week knows that lovemaking is a good gift from God, that sexuality is a part of our very life, that physical intimacy is a good thing for bonding long-term relationships.

We saw also that it is important that we honour God with our sexuality. Well, in this passage, we begin and we see that she is dreaming. The fears that we saw just hinted at last week come up, rise up and confront her.

Look there in chapter 3, verse 1, on page 554. Upon my bed at night I sought him, I sought him whom my soul loves.

[3 : 53] I sought him but found him not. I called him but he gave no answer. The chapter begins by her pining for her lover, yearning to be with him, to be in his presence.

But as she looks around, he's not there. This is a nightmare of absence, a nightmare of abandonment, a nightmare of being separated from the one that you love.

She looks around, she calls out. But there is no answer. So she gets up in verse 2 and goes into the city, that most dangerous place, particularly at night time.

She goes out looking for her lover, a hostile environment compared to the safety of and the privacy of her bedroom. But she must find her lover. Despite the fear and the abandonment, she must have him.

It reminds me of seeing parents losing their children, children in a shopping centre. You know how it is, they're standing there and they're looking around and, where's Johnny?

[4 : 58] Where's Johnny? Is Johnny around? And then panic starts to set in a little bit and they start calling out, Johnny! Johnny, where are you? And then things start just going out of control. The fear of losing your child.

They go to the PA system and across the PA system. If you've seen a little boy wearing blue shirt and red trousers, would you please bring him to the front desk? His mother is very worried about him.

And she's madly running around. Where is her boy? The woman in our passage. Where is my lover? Where is he?

Six months. After our wedding day, my groomsman, groomsman's marriage fell apart. She went running off with another man. I remember one particular night, driving through the city of Sydney in the wee hours of the morning and he just had to try and find her.

It was a desperate attempt. How do you find two people in the middle of a city so big? In many ways, I was glad that we didn't find them. What would we do when we found them?

[6 : 03] But when I was sitting in that car, I saw a man who felt the agony of loss. In verse 3, she finds the city guards, the sentinels, and she asked them, have you seen him whom my soul loves?

So desperate is she. She asked the guards to try and help her. And then as we listen, just as soon as she's seen them, there is this great rush of relief.

She finds him. Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him and would not let him go until I brought him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

She grabs hold of him. She hauls him back. She won't let him go. It's like when the mother sees her child finally. She grabs hold of him and hugs him. The separation is finished.

She just doesn't want to let him go for the fear that she might lose him again. Or that picture of being in an airport where two lovers who have been separated for some time meet and they embrace.

[7 : 11] And they hold each other for so long, not daring to let go for the fear that they might be separated again. It's an interesting picture that we have here.

She drags him back to her mother's bedroom. To us, this doesn't seem like an overly romantic place to drag back your lover to your mother's bedroom. But here in the Bible, we often see that it is the mother who is the one who organises in a marriage's ranger, and arranges marriages, as we see in Ruth chapter 1.

But we also see in chapter 3 that it is Solomon's mother who crowns him on his wedding day. Some even suggest that perhaps here, perhaps this picture of the mother's bedroom is that of her mother's womb.

I guess picking up the image of that of intimacy. She drags him back to a place of intimacy. Whatever it is, the picture that is created is she drags him back to a place of security, of intimacy.

But at this moment, we hear the warning that we heard last week, the warning that is uttered to the daughters of Jerusalem, those characters that pop up from time to time in this love song.

[8 : 28] These characters who end up being a sounding board for the woman. She says to them, Do not stir up or awaken love until it's ready.

She longs for love, but she knows not to rush love. To open yourself up to one, to love someone, and to be loved is to become vulnerable.

To open up yourself to great loss and great pain. She must make sure that she is ready for this, that she is willing to pay the cost. She must wait for the right moment.

What follows in her dreams is that of a royal wedding. It begins in verse 6 with our attention being drawn to some dust on the horizon out in the wilderness.

And the dust is accompanied by all sorts of exotic and luxuriant smells of myrrh and frankincense. As we read through, we see that it is Solomon. Solomon and his entourage who are coming up from the wilderness.

[9 : 31] They're coming to his wedding day. Last week we saw that for the girl, the language of love, the language of love for this woman often sees her simple shepherd boy being turned into a prince.

Here again, the woman turns her simple shepherd boy romantically transforms him into a prince and she starts to dream of her own wedding day, a grand and royal occasion.

Note the luxuriousness of this wedding. It starts talking about the litter or the, later on it calls it the palaquin, which is the bed or the couch upon which Solomon is being carried upon.

It's, I don't know if you've seen pictures of it, they've got the poles which, you know, they hold up the king upon and he sits upon this bed. Sometimes I guess they might be enclosed but it's this luxurious vehicle that Solomon rides around him sitting upon the shoulders of these men who carry him around.

But notice that the way that this luxurious vehicle is described there, it's got 60 fighting men, 60 distinguished soldiers surrounding this vehicle as it goes around.

[10 : 47] It talks about in the Bible that David only had 30 men such as the wealth and the luxuriousness of Solomon. The vehicle is then described and it is a beautiful and comfortable thing made for Solomon.

We see there that the wood is from Lebanon simply representing some of the best quality lumber available. We see that it is made of precious metals that has got purple cloth, rare for that place.

It was made from the pigment of shellfish crushed up. The Phoenicians were the ones who made this dye. But here we see this luxurious picture of Solomon coming to his wedding, a magnificent wedding.

In verse 11 we see there that the woman urges the other younger women, those of the daughters of Jerusalem, to rush out and gaze, gaze upon Solomon wearing his crown, a crown associated with his marriage.

daughters of Jerusalem come out, look O daughters of Zion at King Solomon at the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

[11 : 57] Gaze upon it, look upon it. Solomon is not an intruder into this dream. He's not an intruder into their relationship as many have sought to try and say in many commentaries.

But, we see here that Solomon is someone of a remote figure, one who merges into being the shepherd in the woman's dreams. She dreams of her own wedding as a grand and magnificent wedding, a joyous occasion, a wedding that is fit for a king, a king which is her lover.

In a couple of weeks' time I'm flying up to Sydney for my sister's wedding and it's great listening to her as she plans for her wedding and she's got all the bridesmaids, the dresses sort out, the cake, the place, the venue, the times, the guest list and she starts describing it.

She describes it and you can't but help but see that in her own mind's eye this is going to be our royal wedding. This is going to be our magnificent wedding. She dreams of her husband-to-be and speaks of him as a great king.

She longs for that day and I'm looking forward to being there and marrying my sister. It is not a simple wedding for the woman but in her dreams it is a wedding fit for a king.

[13 : 29] At this point at this point in the poem she dreams of her lover praising her physical beauty. She dreams of him describing her and some of the beauty of her.

Yet as we read through chapter 4 verses 1 through to 7 we see there that some of the parts seem to be quite bizarre and comic and even grotesque at times to our ears yet we need to remember that we are in a different culture as we go through it the picture that the man is describing of this woman is that of someone who is most beautiful someone who is sensuous and he starts from the head and moves down.

Your eyes are doves your hair is like a flock of goats your teeth are like a flock of sure news as I was saying a little bizarre isn't it for our culture your lips are like crimson thread your cheeks are like the halves of a pomegranate your neck is like the tower of David your two breasts are like two fawns twins as a gazelle that feed among the lilies in verse 7 he brings it together you are all together beautiful my love there is no flaw in you what a beautiful description of her may not be for our eyes but in his eyes she is sensuous and beautiful the mood changes slightly we notice here that after describing her after describing her beauty he urgently invites her to be together he wants her to leave the hostile environment that she is and for them to go together to be together look there in verse 8 come with me from Lebanon my bride come with me from Lebanon depart from the peak of Amman from the peak of Seneur from Hermon from the dens of lions from the mountains of leopards here we see this picture of hostility of rugged mountains of lions and leopards and he says come away with me be with me he invites her for intimacy in verses 9 through to 11 he further expresses his admiration of this woman he is absolutely smitten by her absolutely smitten his heart has been ravished in verse 9 in verse 10 he talks about her love being sweet her smells and tastes drive him wild in verses 12 through to 15 he describes his lover as a luscious fruity and spicy garden a garden and also a garden fountain providing living water as we look through the Bible and the rest of this song we see here that the imagery that has been written about here by the author is that of a place of love making a place of the woman's most private and intimate parts and as we read through it we feel a little uncomfortable yet it is done so tastefully in verse 12 we notice that this garden is sealed it is private and it is closed it is not open to anyone however after such a passionate speech after verse 15 she responds to him look in verse 16 awake oh north wind and come oh south wind blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits in chapter 5 verse 1 he responds to this invitation

I come to my garden my sister my bride I gather my myrrh and my spice I eat my honeycomb with my honey I drink my wine with my milk here is a beautiful picture of intimacy a beautiful picture one of the two coming together and at the end we see there at the end of verse 1 that there is this chorus of women the daughters of Jerusalem and they celebrate the union of the man and the woman eat friends drink and be drunk with love here is a dream as we walk as we walk through it a dream of nightmares a dream of wedding days but also a dream of love making that will take place after that day all these dreams in her mind well after such a dramatic climax the mood changes suddenly her dreams turn to nightmares again of abandonment and separation in chapter 5 verse 2 the action begins with a knocking at a door and we hear the voice of her lover the voice asking to come in open to me my sister my love my dove my perfect one for my head is wet with dew and my locks with the drops of the night he's come in pursuit of his woman he has come knocking at the door he has come at some great cost it's over obstacles to actually get there well she then hesitates for a moment or two but then after a time she changes her mind and opens up the door but when she gets to the door he is gone again the imagery that is being used here is that of

I guess the woman's body he is asking for her to open up to him sexually he is asking her that they might be intimate together she hesitates as I said and he is gone I had put off my garment how could I put it on again here is the woman sort of being a little coy or being hesitant about opening up the door I bathed my feet how could I soil them again my beloved thrust his hand into the opening and my inmost being yearned for him I rose to open to my beloved and my hands drip with my fingers with liquid my fingers upon the handles of the bolt I opened to my beloved but my beloved had gone and was gone my soul failed me when he spoke she opens up herself and he's gone the nightmare begins again the nightmare of separation she sets out in hot pursuit searching for him in the public places looking everywhere like she did in the first one searching for him calling out for him in the city where is her lover like last time she doesn't find him and again she finds the sentinels those city guards patrolling the city but this time it's different their response to her is very different look in verse seven making their rounds in the city the sentinels found me they beat me they wounded me they took away my mantle those sentinels of the war she went out searching for a lover but instead found violence well after that she calls out to the daughters of Jerusalem to help her find her lover she desperately wants to find him so she asks requests of them to help look for him in verse nine they then respond to her what is your beloved more than another beloved oh fairest among women what is your beloved more than another beloved that you adjure us the women ask what's so special about this guy what's all the fuss why put yourself in danger rushing around a city trying to find this man surely there are many other men who would love you why chase after this guy and then what we have in verses 10 through to 16 is a beautiful description by the woman of her man she describes what makes this man so precious to him my beloved is all radiant and ruddy distinguished among 10,000 and then she starts from the head and works down to his toes describing him his head is the finest gold his locks are wavy black as raven his eyes are like doves his cheeks are like beds of spices his lips are lilies his arms are rounded gold set with jewels his body is ivory work encrusted with sapphires his legs are alabaster columns his appearance is like lebanon choices the cedars and she finishes up his speech is most sweet and is altogether desirable this is my beloved and this is my friend oh daughters of jerusalem she describes her lover this is the one that she wants to be with she describes his physical beauty well struck with such wonder such beauty the women of jerusalem ask where can we find this man they ask in verse 1 and in verse 2 and 3 she tells the women where he can be found my beloved has gone to his garden to the bed of spices to pasture his flock in the gardens to gather lilies here she says

[23 : 38] that he has gone to an intimate place and that is where you can find him well as we get towards the end of the chapter and towards the end of the dream the man then speaks up again describing the unique beauty of the woman there are many repetitions of what we saw in the first lot many much of the imagery that is there but even at the end of that description of verses 4 to 10 we see there in verse 10 that even the women join in their enthusiastic assessment of the beauty of the woman who is this that looks forth like the dawn fair as the moon bright as the sun terrible as an army with banners one of my favourite verses in this section here as he describes her is verse 5 turn away your eyes from me for they overwhelm me her beauty as she stares upon him is too much for him it rocks him to his core it shakes him her beauty is just so so overwhelming that he asks her not to look at him so much is his desire and love and admiration of this woman well the woman in verse 11 goes down to the garden goes to this place of intimacy

I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley to see where the vines had budded where the pomegranates were in bloom before I was aware my fancy set me in a chariot beside my prince she goes to that intimate place and then she is in her own mind leaps into a chariot and is beside her prince yet again bringing to mind the picture of the wedding day of Solomon there she is riding off into the distance in her chariot with her prince the wedding day is over I wonder back then whether they had the cans that would go out the back of the chariot as it took off and you know whether they sort of wrote on just married on the side of the chariot or what happens but in her own mind's eye she is riding off riding off with her prince her king the chapter concludes with the daughters of Jerusalem calling the woman back to reality calling her back from her dreams return return

I sure might return that we may look upon you she responds why should you look upon the sure might as upon a dance before two armies in this one dream she brings together the ecstasy and agony of a relationship together she longs for love but she also fears it she dreams of love and her wedding day but she fears it also the fear of separation the fear of abandonment her fears rise up and confront her no wonder as we read through this great song that the refrain keeps on coming up do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready do not stir up love do not awaken it until it is ready here is a song that has a profound reality about it here is a song that is about life real life real relationships both the ecstasy and the agony the author knows that we do not live anymore in the garden of eden but in a fallen world a world where love can easily turn into lust and love making become rape that any relationship involves hurt and pain and frustrations that there is a great cost in love the cost of loving the cost of being in love for when you are in that relationship you make yourself incredibly vulnerable to the possibility of being crushed a couple of days ago

I was speaking with a friend over Christmas his marriage of six years broke up both were church attenders she walked out on him I sat there listening to him him describing how he felt about the whole thing of his lover walking away from his life he said imagine your worst nightmares that wasn't hard for me to do I guess for many of us he said imagine your worst nightmares then make it a reality for him his life at the moment is a living nightmare losing his wife was losing his heart a big part of him has gone he yearns for her company he feels like all the air has been crushed out of him it is important that we read the song of songs that we hear sermons from song of songs it is important that we know what it is to be in love all of us marries singles everyone it is important to know about love that we might foster and promote good and godly relationships as a church we need to be praying praying for our relationships in the church here as a church we need to be praying and caring for those who are in the midst of great hurt and great pain as a church we need to be praying for our couples that they will be godly in the way that they relate to one another married couples you need to know the great harm that you can cause by the simple words by your actions hear the great harm the great pain that we see in this song pray for one another pray that you might be captured by each other's beauty pray that you may drink long and hard from each other's fountains that you may not be tempted to go elsewhere take practical steps spend time each night turning the television off and talking to one another spend time with each other good quality time try to limit the time apart from one another long periods of time for those of us here who have been hurt by love who are hurting at the moment we need to be praying and caring for them for all of us we need to know that there is a

God who loves us a God who can sympathise with our pain a God who sacrificed his son on a cross suffering the terrible pain of separation from him in order that we might be a part of his family such love such care for us a place of forgiveness forgiveness if you're a person who has done terrible things know that there is forgiveness there that your sins can be forgiven God has made us for relationships may we go into them and live in them with our eyes wide open that we may know all aspects of it both the beauty of it but also the pain of it let me pray father we do indeed thank you for this song this song of love father we pray for our marriages here for our relationships here that we have in this church we pray that you'll indeed bring great blessing upon them that you'll be protecting them that you help us to be a church that is caring and loving of one another supporting and promoting godly and good relationships we pray this in your son's name amen